# Jazz violin
## myths, identities, and the creative process

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# Jazz Violin: Myths, Identities, and The Creative Process

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## Abstract

This project is a practice-based artistic research exploring the nature of jazz violin performance. It uses current literature on jazz performance and improvisation to provide a context where the violin is able to build an improvising practice through jazz. This dissertation will be accompanied by a body of performance works to illustrate various creative conditions that are found in the practice of improvisation. It also seeks to reaffirm and discover new social and creative positions of an improvising violinist, finding the gaps between musical and social positions of a musician.

The thesis discusses the use of auto-ethnography as a relevant research methodology for artistic research. It will establish the research question 'why jazz', through a reflective account of improvising violin practice. The discussion of what a jazz tradition is and the effect of jazz education is essential to establish creative practices for developing a jazz violin aesthetic. It includes documenting observations and participating at jazz violin workshops, seminars, personal interviews with leading practitioners, and opinions of my collaborators and ensemble members. This project will focus on three case studies while using other performances to enhance and support my observations and analysis. The social implications of the creative process, in particular, gender and racial stereotypes, are also discussed through the use of auto-ethnography.

The portfolio will include several recordings with various ensembles I have worked with or projects I have participated in. It demonstrates the application of improvisation in various musical contexts and the necessity for creative variety as a jazz violinist. It also demonstrates the benefits of classical technique in advancing an improvisatory style. The multiplicity of genres reflects the fractured identity of an improvising violinist, highlighting the research process which is about negotiating different and occasionally, contrasting positions of a practitioner-researcher. Additionally, the application of auto-ethnography to both practice and research reflects the dynamic nature of the creative process.

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## Acknowledgments

My writing took me exactly 9 months, gradually growing it in shape and form. The delivery (a.k.a. submission) was less straightforward and complications seem to arise at every corner. Like an expectant mother, I saw a crisis in everything. However, the good doctor and supervisor, Andy Fry, had only my best interests at heart. The first and foremost thanks must go to him for dispensing his insightful supervision, delicate handling of my anxious state, and reliably positive nature throughout the three years. Andy, I am so glad to do this work, not just with someone who is brilliant like you, but someone who *is* you.

The nature of my research meant that I was never isolated as my practice led me to various musical networks, establishing working relationships that have become long-lasting friendships. I am grateful for the patience, openness, intelligence, and generosity of every musician I have met and worked with – old and new. In particular, Jim Bashford, Ash Trigg, JP Muir, Veryan Weston, Bei Bei Wang, Philipp Martin, Sophie Dolamore, Caroline Kraabel, and countless others who have indirectly shaped me and my practice. Thanks also must go to musicians, researchers, and friends who have been generous and considerate resources: Anthony Barnett, Fung Chern Hwei, and Ari Poutiainen. They entered a point in my research when all seemed murky and I am grateful for their 'light'.

London can be crowded and lonely, but it was never so living at Goodenough College. I owe a great deal of my (in)sanity and happiness to friends I have made there and now consider to be my extended family. The College has also been a home that has allowed me (mostly) unrestricted access to grow as a musician. Furthermore, the research would not have been possible without the financial grant of the Malaysian Government and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). This opportunity has been an immense privilege – I am proud to return a better version of myself, to a greater nation.

Finally, gratitude must go to my mother and sister who have raised me from the ground up, instilling values of hard work and humility in everything I do – I still try to meet those expectations daily. There is no better example of that than my sister. I dedicate this work to her and the memory of our father, the first musician in the family. In using medical metaphors here, I remind myself of my first ambition to be a neurosurgeon. Now, I am a jazz violinist vying for a title that does not even qualify me for any medical practice. Yet, what do I know – apparently, jazz violin is a myth. Enjoy reading!

# Preface

Why jazz? As a violinist, it is a question that is naturally asked because it is uncommon to encounter one of us who plays something other than classical or folk music. Furthermore, in music institutions, the performance divisions are generally divided in binary form between classical and jazz. So, if you are a violinist, it follows that you must be a classical violinist. Hence, the puzzlement of 'why jazz?'. My research is an attempt to explain my creative decisions in practice, to explore some of the problems that it generates, and to examine possible solutions to them. It is the result of several years mulling over my social position from when I was a student musician to the slow discovery of the musical possibilities of being a jazz violinist. It has not escaped my notice that the social demographics of jazz are skewed – not only among the musicians around me but also in the ones that students are told to reference in their practice. Thus, explaining my turn towards jazz involves reviewing my musical decision-making, documenting how I accomplished it, and observing my creative practice in a social context. These are the cornerstones of my auto-ethnography and key methods of my research.

My initial answer to the enquiry 'Why jazz?' as a student was less sophisticated. I could continue my classical training independently, I reasoned, and should really learn something new for the outrageous outlay in international student fees. The opportunity to learn jazz violin is rather limited in most institutions and I should not turn down this offer if given one. Another attraction to learning jazz was the ability to improvise, as this, if nothing else, would be considered a superior musical skill. While improvisation was common practice centuries ago, the development of music education (among other factors) has defined clearer boundaries between musical text and improvised practice. This gap is

explored in greater detail later as I try to refine what it means to play the violin and to play jazz. Since I still consider myself first and foremost classically trained, even though my studies in higher education were primarily of jazz, this discussion will thread uncomfortably, sometimes clumsily, between 'jazz' and 'classical' platforms, seeking to shed light between these perspectives.

Significantly, the question 'why jazz?' is always posed to me from a non-musical standpoint. That is, no one has asked me this after hearing me play jazz. (The follow-up to that is 'how?') The 'why' question, then, supposes that jazz is not a natural (musical or social) disposition for someone like me. My dissertation tries to locate more precisely what 'someone like me' could mean – and the range is surprisingly broad. Of course, the violin is still a relatively uncommon jazz instrument, for all its popularity in folk music and earlier in jazz. But the question must be coloured by other conditions, since it arises before any musical exposition. Perhaps it arises from my being one of the few female instrumentalists in the jazz scene. My racial position as a visible minority is influenced partly by the location of my practice, and partly as a cultural immigrant accessing Western European and American music – but with jazz, 'natural' has an altogether loaded meaning. As I try to develop an understanding of the jazz tradition through my application of it in creative practice, my perspective is invariably that of a misfit, albeit one that changes in size and shape according to the context.

# Introduction

I grew up in Malaysia listening to my mum compare our childhoods, emphasising how privileged I was to have the upbringing that I had. We were by no means rich, but nor were we living in poverty. Education was the only means of upward social mobility and I would go on to have that privilege in spades. Meanwhile, there were many 'back in the day' stories to endure. They were meant, perhaps, as lessons in gratefulness, but they brought out a certain kind of discomfort, even distaste, with my present reality. If the values of the past were applied to me, I came up short (or different, as I might have argued). I appreciated the value of knowing my background in constructing identity in a meaningful way. But I was frustrated to find myself tested against a past that had limited relevance to what I hoped to accomplish in the present day. In short, it was a constant process of negotiation to treat tradition respectfully, purposefully, and meaningfully in my own time.

Casting back now to grasp what I understand about jazz history and tradition, I realize that I am asking the same questions in my practice. I am comparing myself (or being compared) to a historical practice of jazz and finding that I come up short — or at least, troublingly different. While my life and musical practice are different subjects, the discomfort of my position persists in jazz. I seek to accomplish different things in my creative practice, all the while the spectre of jazz tradition looms over me. I recognize that there are parts of my creative identity that do not fully align with jazz and that might refer to my background as a classically-trained violinist or lack of early exposure to jazz music. It is difficult to articulate what that gap is to me, whether it is merely a self-perceived shortcoming or a socio-musical incompatibility. Yet, I recognize that a creative tradition is one that transforms rote practice into creative works – that my 'misalignment' might

transcend stereotypical practice and expand creative possibilities in the jazz tradition. In unpacking this tricky position, I seek to locate the relevance of my work and to provide a critical framework for my creative output.

I begin by contemplating the jazz tradition. My aim is not to represent the genre and its practices objectively and conclusively (even if it such a thing were possible), but to map out my consciousness of jazz, as an Asian female violinist. Krin Gabbard's belief that jazz is a 'construct' is reflective of the condition that there is no one-size-fits-all perspective. The closest to a workable proposition may be Ross Russell's (1948) that all styles of jazz are 'equally valid' and authenticated through their 'central essence' (DeVeaux, 1991:540). This opens up the possibility of viewing jazz as an organic extension of African and African American cultures that has developed as a 'living cultural form'. While these are fairly ambiguous terms, they allow us to overcome the problem of writing about jazz's difficult social history and disjointed stylistic changes. Nevertheless, DeVeaux cautions against the assumption of formulating a 'unitary narrative' in constructing a notion of the jazz tradition. This transcendent principle of unity and continuity, he argues, requires us to overlook other practices formed from jazz that do not stem from the same creative motivations. His more open-minded approach is what I need to settle my creative differences with jazz as I formulate my own narrative.

The importance of finding my place within the jazz tradition cannot be overstated. My background as a classical violinist, and my upbringing fairly removed from popular music (more so, jazz) has created an insecurity about how I approach and understand the jazz practice. Indeed, Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* (1994:22) describes how jazz commonly seeps into musical knowledge from childhood. It is, perhaps, self-evident that early exposure contributes to musical sensibilities. But this becomes my dilemma as I sense that my lack of

early exposure has ill-equipped me for learning jazz, though perhaps learning to play jazz is an issue that can be systematically resolved. Specifically, it seems that 'playing jazz' in one form or another is less the issue than the identity of 'being a jazz musician'. The distinction is one that I will explore further through artistic research. Yet, it is only natural that I begin my narrative with learning to play jazz – and this sets up the first part of my research undertaking, answering what jazz violin is and how to perform in that style.

One of the first issues I encountered with jazz violin is the unfamiliarity of improvising on the violin. There is a limited (perhaps even, conservative) understanding of what improvisation can be on the violin and it stems from a combination of factors. The first is formal training on the instrument and its close association with the classical style. The second is a lack of models for what a jazz violin practice is and its other creative values. The third picks up on the first two in that, while many examples of improvising on the violin can be found in musical traditions such as folk, gypsy, and Indian Karnatic music, I found it difficult to construct a jazz violin form because of my personal association of violin-playing with a Western European tradition. Furthermore, most jazz violinists would claim the necessity for technical expertise on the instrument (of which most of its technical treatise is based on a Western European construct) in order to explore the creative potential of jazz on the violin. Lastly, the limited examples of the violin in jazz ensembles seem to demonstrate the stylistic incompatibilities of the instrument to the jazz style. My subsequent enquiries then become: how can improvisation enhance the creative capacity of the musician in order to overcome the superficial difficulties of playing jazz on the violin? And indeed, how does it engage with my earlier distinction between 'playing jazz' and 'being a jazz musician'?

In order to do that, I will establish what a jazz violin practice is through a conceptualization of improvisation. The association of jazz with improvisation opens up a

variety of issues pertaining to creative legitimacy and meaning; but crucially, it offers an opportunity to create musical expressions that are authentic to the musician, not just applicable to the tradition. I feel this is critical in pushing my learning of jazz beyond a theoretical understanding to a practical approach. Taking a closer look at jazz in terms of improvisation also includes understanding the creative process from a social perspective. After all, music is not created in isolation and the performance of improvisation allows the question of identity to emerge within a group. Furthermore, improvisation as a social practice opens the scope for research in which I outline steps of learning jazz on the violin while gradually developing an identity as a jazz musician in various creative settings.

Mirroring the arc of a theoretical to practical approach, I employ a research methodology that embraces both traditional ethnographical study and an auto-ethnographic perspective. While an ethnographical study details the practice of various jazz violinists, it necessarily seeks to locate these also in their varied musical backgrounds and creative settings. Likewise, my account must include an auto-ethnographical perspective in order to contextualize how I have learnt and developed my practice. Through this varied method I am able to explore how 'being a jazz musician' is more than a matter of 'playing jazz'. Artistic research tracks my experimentation with various ethnographical observations and management of other non-musical circumstances in my creative practice by using my personal reflections as part of an auto-ethnographic study. I believe that such a hybrid method is the most appropriate way to capture both the practical and conceptual nature of the creative process in an artistic research setting.

## Auto-ethnography and Artistic Research

As explained earlier, the creative process draws on a combination of nurture (playing jazz) and nature (jazz musician) in developing a musician's identity. This is the gap I want to

address in my artistic research by using a combination of methodologies that can clarify this position. The write-up, thus, has to accommodate both perspectives equally and I refer to several sources to help me strike such a balance. Because jazz is closely associated with improvisation, I look at how these issues are addressed at large by Derek Bailey (1992) and David Toop (2016) in their writings. Meanwhile, Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* (1994) offers detailed perspectives from jazz musicians about their practice. All three sources provide generous amounts of personal reflection and are models of informed, reflective writing. Looking beyond the literature on jazz and improvisation, *Perspectives on Artistic Research in Music* edited by Robert Burke and Andrys Onsman (2017) is a wide-ranging and thoughtful contribution to the literature on practice-based research. Bringing together music practitioners of various backgrounds, the book locates theoretical exigencies in creative practices. While the contributors have familiar worries about translating practice into research, they express and resolve them in different manners depending on their areas. My project has been similarly rife with insecurities, with the journey from practice to research, hence, practice-*as*-research proving a necessary ordeal.

If, following Krin Gabbard, 'jazz is a construct', articulating 'my jazz' will require careful consideration of the tradition, the practice, and the positioning of Self to both these aspects. Writing the Self ('mesearch') demands, like all research, a specific methodology and framework. But it is not easy or natural to structure Self that way, especially in creative work; besides, another musician's practice is easier to document than one's own. Having to interact with one's object by means of self-analysis is tricky and compromising. Putting my creative work aside for now, how do I make objective judgments that may form legitimate research outcomes? Music researcher Jane Davidson is frustrated that her creative practice never features in her research, even as her enquiries are driven by those very practices. Yet

she finds the border between reflective and self-reflective processes difficult to cross in expressing her research (2015:97). For example, field notes are commonly used to capture experiences through qualitative reflection. They offer both a richly descriptive and a resourceful practice (Krüger, 2009). However, field notes are typically unfiltered observations, which must be sifted and distilled before they may contribute to the published record. But if the researcher is also the research subject, the 'unfiltered' data may be the best account, before self-censorship creates a different Self. Perhaps this explains why many performance-research articles adopt an informal tone to situate their research, while the more formal of others suggests an objectivity that proves difficult to sustain. Even if there is no widely accepted method to adopt, the very process of reflection inevitably affects how I construct my creative practice, my jazz.

A characteristic of practice-based music research through auto-ethnography is therefore that each project is largely self-determining, and its engagement with research data dependent on the nature of the particular enquiry. Bartleet (2009) provides a highly descriptive account of her auto-ethnographic process as a conductor, which became instrumental in her understanding of her practice. Her reflections on the method of auto-ethnography offer a useful guide as to how auto-ethnography can function in musical research. (This, along with Davidson 2015 mentioned above, are reference points for my study.) Like Bartleet, I feel it necessary to establish my research context and situate my reflections in a research mode. I ask the same question as her: 'What would a music auto-ethnography look like?' (2009:721) To me, data collection is less clear in an auto-ethnographic context than an ethnographic one. In the well-established structure of ethnographic enquiry (Hood, 1960; Baily, 2008), practitioner-researchers attempt to understand a musical culture by learning to play, participate, and reflect on their

experiences. Throughout, the researcher seeks not to interfere with how the practice is executed and the scholar's participation is inconsequential to the research; personal experience is merely a means to gain knowledge of the musical practice. In auto-ethnographic enquiry, however, the researcher determines the execution of the creative practice that feeds into the research outcome. That is to say, the data generated is dependent on how the practice is structured and executed. To my mind, this represents a 'conflict of interest' of a sort.

In conducting this project, while actively engaged in various musical projects, I was also aware of the more immediate necessity of fulfilling a research goal. Since my research outcome was dependent on my practice, I was sometimes in the position of crafting my projects to fit my projected (or possibly, preferred) research outcome. Even when other occasions have allowed me to participate initially without any research considerations, I have retrospectively thought of how to engage with my research topic, thus potentially changing my perception of the event. During my creative work, I was palpably aware that any research observations I undertook might have implications on my subsequent creative decisions, requiring some measure of self-deception to maintain an inner balance between instinctive creative process and organised research work. I constantly questioned to what degree my research could be derived from the creative process – and critically, if this was even possible.

Perhaps this condition would have been less pronounced if I had had an established musical life in London at the beginning of the project, from which the research could emerge. Since my creative practice and my research project began anew in this city at the start of my degree, however, the conflicted nature of my artistic research was sorely apparent (at least, to me). As a result, I chose to start the project from a research

perspective, while allowing my creative practice time to take hold in a new environment. Such an approach, beginning by asking 'what is jazz violin?' and 'how to play jazz on the violin?' seemed to be a more secure starting point than rushing headlong into practice-as-research. Because the nature of artistic research lay in experiencing the answer, I urged myself not to think too far about consolidating a research plan but to care about the musical output first – as that is where meaning would emerge. Here, 'interest' in playing music superseded my 'duty' to the research, even as I couldn't help but wonder what kind of output would emerge.

An uncomfortable factor for me about auto-ethnography is that it is not so much about contemplating the musical result as about documenting one's creative practice. That is to say, the quality of the music is not what is at stake, but rather the process through which that music is produced. Indeed, Stephen Emmerson notes that, while level of expertise is likely to be the central concern of the practitioner, a highly polished and technically adept performance may only offer 'few, if any, new insights'. He concedes, however, that understanding of the process is unlikely to arise from a performance without a high level of technical and artistic expertise (2017:34). The dilemma here is between agendas of creative practice and research practice. That is, if one focusses on the research, the music must become secondary to the process – which as a musician makes me feel vulnerable. How can I be a music researcher if the music is not first and foremost? Bartleet concurs with my worries as she bemoans that her models of auto-ethnographic writing, such as Ruth Behar (1999), Laurel Richardson (2000), and Carolyn Ellis (2004), all practise in fields such as visual arts and dance rather than music. To her, the intangibility of music hinders the 'ethno' part of the process. Here, I have to agree. As is so often the case, music is one of the hardest objects to observe, document, and articulate. Music's ephemerality,

along with its variability in performance, puts scholars in a difficult position; documenting the practice for research 'may at worst [come to] replace the thing itself' (Nelson, 2013:6). Documentation is critical in order for subsequent research to replicate and build upon the outcome. Yet creative work must in theory avoid replication, making research and creative processes unorthodox allies.

In this way, I faced a constant struggle between artistic outcomes and academic research. Some of the initial questions I received about my practice-based music research were: How does it work? What do you do? People were genuinely curious as to how a research degree in music might work, particularly a practice-based one. The project would not in itself mean that I became superior as a musician, though that is a rational enough expectation. Neither would I become an expert in a particular musical culture, as in the case of ethnographical research. In a sense, I was becoming an expert in myself as a musician – which proves hard to defend as warranting a higher academic qualification – though my conclusions will, I hope, resonate with others. Robert Vincs asks a similar question about Clark Moustakas' suggestion that a phenomenological investigation must 'arrive at a topic and question that have both social meaning and personal significance' (Moustakas, 1994:104): Are 'social meaning' and 'personal significance' compatible? Vincs veers from the anxious ('Does my artistic practice have social meaning?') to the irrational, if familiar ('Am I worthy?'). The expectation to find 'social meaning' in research can overwhelm 'personal significance', he argues, particularly when musicians investigate their own practices (Vincs, 2017:50). In pursuing this research, not only did I have to convince others that I have a worthwhile field of enquiry, I also had to convince myself that these were pertinent questions that needed answering – for the sake of artistic practice, the industry, and myself as a participant in both. In Henk Borgdorff's words: 'Art practice qualifies as research when

its purpose is to broaden our knowledge and understanding through an original investigation' (2012:43).

Bartleet (2009) struggles with finding the perfect model to engage music research through auto-ethnography, to the point that she confesses to missing the point of music altogether. Her epiphany comes from a conversation with a colleague about relationships in music-making, humanizing the composers and their compositions: 'Music […] is about the relationships that are evoked through the process of music-making' (p.721). I have come to a similar understanding of auto-ethnography, having once been so obsessed with it as a research method that I (like Bartleet) missed the point of the creative process altogether. By doing ethnographic work, I engage with people and places that are foreign to me, often in circumstances that are beyond my control. What makes my work 'auto' is that I retain some autonomy over my music-making practice. The self-affirmation is empowering. Although practising to become a more proficient musician may not in itself be a research activity, it is integral in ensuring the quality of the performance. Glen Hodges calls on practitioner-researchers to stop apologizing for doing research in ways that are appropriate (and I would add, necessary) to us (2017:92).

Yet, creative practice remains distinct from research, even when it is what is being investigated. The 'conflict of interest' I highlighted earlier becomes my point of concern, if not contention, in this project. Are my creative projects genuine if they are bound to the necessity of research outcomes? The autonomy I (imagine to) have over my music-making practice further highlights the *lack of* autonomy that I have over a research project. The demand for a well-constructed research framework somehow dampens the creative verve for me even as the rationale for it is strong. This conflict is drawn out at various points throughout the creative process when I try to engage with my research aims. For every time

I construct a creative moment comes another when I lose sight of the intended target of my research. Estelle Barrett draws on Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity (1993) in practice-based methodologies, whereby it is both an aspect and a strength of creative research. She concludes that 'inbuilt reflexivity' allows creative issues and problems to arise naturally and need not be present from the beginning of the research (2007:6). Of course, this understanding is problematic because articulation of a research question is paramount to structuring an investigation. But here is the dilemma: In trying to complete a study, one may attempt a creative project that would not ordinarily have been on the agenda, thus affecting the research outcome. I have had many such moments of doubt, when I question my motivations while trying to find instance between creative work and research.

Despite this, auto-ethnography and ethnography combine effectively in articulating the research as a whole. An ethnography alone would be insufficient in revealing the contextual limitations of a creative process; while auto-ethnography does little to relate with the creative practice at large. Therefore, the use of both methods can engage directly with what jazz violin practice is, or might be, and its attendant issues. When results of my auto-ethnography diverge from the collective ethnography, as they naturally do, I do not seek to resolve these differences. That is, even after meeting various other jazz violinists and discovering their creative practice and methods, I do not seek to emulate their particular journeys. Application of my ethnographic findings is thus not central to my auto-ethnographic material, with which it is mostly contextually incompatible. It was important to me that I maintain the fine balance between personal creative development and research investigation. After all, my research aims needed, in some measure, to respond to (and emerge from) my creative practice – strengthening Barrett's assertion. The situation I

wanted to avoid was where an overlap between the two perspectives might diminish the strength of either.

In the initial stages of the research process, the demand for a research question seemed to attract unnecessary distractions. Personally, I found it unhelpful in leading me forward and the more pressing issue to resolve was a lack of creative opportunities. I had recently moved to London from Malaysia and recognized that being a research student in this instance had no value if I had no creative practice to investigate. In some ways, the social aspects of working out a musical practice as a jazz violinist in a new environment quickly became my underlying concern. This did not directly translate to a research question, though it certainly can be classified as a relevant issue which bears consideration in contextualizing my research. All musicians negotiate new creative situations as a matter of course; why musicians decide to play together is often first of all a social matter, which may feed into other creative aspects.

Authoritative bodies like Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) rule that creative practice is regarded as research when there are explicit research questions, clear methodology and rationale, and that outcomes of the research are disseminated to others (Biggs, 2002, pp.19-24). While having a formulated research question is a useful and most common way of beginning an investigation, Robin Nelson (2013:30) has argued against the formulation of a specific question, especially one that requires a definitive answer. Stephen Emmerson even states that it is 'not always appropriate for artistic research and may in fact limit the investigation' (2017:31). As far as the objection that having a fully formed research question may pre-empt one's creative impulses, George Petelin suggests that a research question is best considered 'not as a determinant of practice but as an essential instrument for observing and reflecting on the progress of that practice' (2014:193). This echoes Estelle

Barrett's opinion that in artistic research specific intentions may not necessarily be present from the beginning but may change and develop throughout the creative process (Barrett & Bolt, 2007:6). For me, this process of refinement took place through various activities that directly or indirectly relate to my creative practice. In retrospect, I have come to understand that my research involved answering preliminary questions such as 'what is jazz violin?' or 'how can I improvise on the violin?' which helped to shape my research interests more lucidly.

My dissertation will employ reflexive writing at many stages. It is impossible to isolate the sections that are 'academic' and those dealing with creativity. Furthermore, some reflections necessarily look back beyond my PhD years to earlier points in my life and development as a musician. Reference to my prior training and experience is central to contextualizing my research and offering a 'location in a lineage' (Nelson, 2013:31). Throughout, I seek a tone that feels true to my experience, even as that differs from detached, academic prose. After all, if creative acts are singular, particular, and personal, why should the accompanying research not reflect that? The final two sections of this introduction outline the shape of the dissertation as a whole and the contents of each of its chapters. They serve to orient the reader and to highlight key aspects of my approach and my results.

## Sketches

The first part of my research is articulated from an ethnographic perspective. It relies on my past learning experience and other observations from workshops and interviews I conducted between 2016-2018. I interviewed several jazz violinists from within my network and relied on their references for other interview opportunities. I used various modes of communication like Skype, speaking in person, and email communication. I made no

distinction between violinists who identify as jazz musicians and improvising string musicians, as it reflects also my creative position. In retrospect, while the interviews represented an ethnographic approach, my mindset was decidedly an auto-ethnographic one. I understood that their perspectives and experience are relevant to a specific context despite the correlation of our practice. This distinction was necessary in retaining an autonomous creative practice for myself while also investigating specific issues that may arise in the creative process. Their input illustrated many aspects of jazz violin practice that is as varied as it is specific.

I begin by establishing what a jazz violin practice is through consideration of its learning contexts. The dynamisms of a jazz practice, be it the variety of musical arrangement or instrumentation, impacts how one approaches learning jazz methodically against the more traditional process of learning jazz communally. I compare settings of learning jazz in an institution and learning jazz through jam sessions, in order to explore the obvious benefits and hidden difficulties of each. In an effort to learn how to improvise stylistically for jazz, both methods hold much importance, though with different social implications. Drawing on my other creative experiences, I discover how improvisation can enhance one's creative identity. Improvisation is not a merely a tool of expression for jazz, but as Derek Bailey suggests that 'as a way of making music it can serve many ends', without hinting at a particular style or presupposing an artistic attitude (1992:142). This statement can be taken two ways: one, that jazz can have a broader definition and multiple creativities that draw from the jazz tradition, using improvisation as key; two, that improvisation takes the discussion of creative identity away from jazz altogether, making it irrelevant whether one is a jazz musician or not, and focussing instead on creative practice. Both perspectives broadly follows how my thesis is conceptualized.

Chapters 1–4 deal with how I learn jazz on the violin and manage socio-musical issues that arise from my practice. They are structured by means of a themed narrative, which proceeds from technical aspects of the violin, through conceptual formulations of improvisation, to other social considerations of jazz practice. The order of the themes reflects my personal experience of learning jazz violin, though they do not follow my career in strict chronological order. Rather, the ordering represents the most effective structure for me to narrate my creative process in a research format. These chapters guide the reader through various phases of my development as I explore information that derives historically from my learning process and contextually from various creative settings in which I have been involved. Some of these experiences occurred during this research period (whose creative projects are explored much further in the second half of the thesis) but many precede it.

Chapter 1 deals with my experience of learning jazz throughout my student years, exploring the many expectations and misunderstandings of jazz violin practice in this context. I explore the technicalities of the violin as an intuitively uncomfortable instrument to improvise upon: so much so that 'jazz violin' is considered a myth by one of my tutors. The technical expectations for a violinist seem to supersede improvisatory nous, further driving the comparison between 'playing jazz' and 'being a jazz musician'. However, this does not negate the creative work of great jazz violinists such as Stuff Smith, Stéphane Grappelli, Jean-Luc Ponty, Mark Feldman, and Regina Carter (to name but a few). On the contrary, I consider how their playing styles, instrumental techniques and personal sounds may be adopted and adapted by student musicians. Through this discussion, I endeavour to bridge the gap between classical violin training and acquiring a jazz sound and jazz language. The rigour of classical training may assist in learning jazz, but it may also be a hindrance to

the improvisatory spirit. This dichotomy is explored via musical literature, workshops, interviews with practitioners (both student and professional), to provide a comprehensive picture of jazz violin practice. It is by no means conclusive, but it highlights the diversity of jazz violin methods when compared to the relatively standard pedagogies of more familiar jazz instruments.

Furthermore, learning to play jazz on the violin does not easily translate to playing jazz with other musicians. It is not only a matter of learning to improvise but also of adapting stylistically to play with others – and typically, one learns how to do this at jam sessions. In Chapter 2, I consider how musicians use jam sessions as spaces of learning, networking, and negotiating power. These are the hallowed grounds where musicians hone their 'chops' (skills). Jam sessions represent a host of social symbolisms, not least that they facilitate the 'passing down' of jazz practice. They constitute audible and visible presentations of the community's expectations, some or all of which translate to other jazz scenes. A jam session is a community that functions as a 'large educational system for producing, preserving, and transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums' (Berliner, 1994:37). In most cases, it gradually develops a particular identity, whose specificity of style can be a drawback for violinists to participate. There are many reasons for this of which can be musical or technical. Naturally, this has implications on social interactions among musicians as jam sessions operate like a community and the position of the violin in jazz is relatively undefined.

The issue of playing with others leads to a discussion of the violin in jazz ensembles. Comparing this to classical contexts, I seek to discover what is a suitable position for the violin and why. The violin has been used in various settings in jazz – anything from a backing

section in *Charlie Parker with Strings* (1950), via jazz string quartets such as *Turtle Island String Quartet,* to violin-led jazz ensembles like Regina Carter's projects. Yet when Berendt and Huesmann (2005:519) report that the violin is used widely in popular music, they are referring to nineteenth and twentieth-century practices. My twenty-first century experience of the violin in jazz training suggests otherwise. As a student musician, I encountered uneven treatment of the violin in jazz ensembles. As I explore in Chapter 2, placement in respective ensembles were determined in part by institutional requirements and in part by student interests. Both gave rise to various musical and social complications to negotiate, informing my decisions about modelling my own ensemble. Furthermore, my contrasting experiences with jazz musicians such as Chris Potter and Dave Holland provide rich material for me to learn from. While the violin may be found in various jazz contexts, the variety speaks more of its unstable identity than of its creative accomplishments. While these projects deserve credit, the purpose of my research is not only to praise the exceptions but also to interrogate the general rule. As jazz moved towards the more respectable position of art music, the violin (still seen as a symbol of high-culture) ironically retreated from jazz. This leads me to ponder the various musical and social factors that might have led to its retreat – and how, as a jazz violinist, to overcome them.

In Chapter 3, I consider how improvisation is synonymously associated with jazz, perpetuating the misunderstood role of improvisation in the development of a jazz language. Just because one can improvise does not mean that one is a jazz musician – and vice versa, although the reverse is harder to prove, since jazz solos may be learned. For example, Wynton Marsalis' 'heritage-style' jazz is one context in which improvisation is quite formulaic. Adorno, a fierce critic of jazz, questioned the nature of creative invention (improvisation) in jazz, calling it a 'mechanical freedom' (1989:56). But what are the

elements that identify jazz and how can one recreate them if the practice is improvisatory? Perhaps the big misconception is in thinking that jazz is all about improvisation, when it is more than that. Yet what 'more than that' entails is not straightforward to identify. Berliner writes that improvisation seems to be defined more for what it is not than for what it is (1994:2). Part of the reason for this is the role of education – and Keith Javors (2001) has criticised the loss of 'indigenous' perspectives of jazz improvisation with the application of 'disparate values systems' in jazz education. Even earlier, John Norris (1984) explained that jazz, which was intimately connected to an organic process of apprenticeship under working musicians, would be blunted by a shift to an academic and institutionalized setting. In his words, it would sound 'like jazz but really isn't it'. Initially, these criticisms did not concern me as my first priority was to sound 'like jazz' and to do that I first had to learn how to improvise.

George Lewis suggests that there are two kinds of improvisational mode: an Afrological and a Eurological (2004), or, simplistically, jazz and contemporary classical forms. Both are historically shaped by the American experience. Indeed, Derek Bailey credits the revitalisation of improvisation in Western classical music to jazz (1992:48), further cementing the relationship between both models. This identification with the American experience is crucial in understanding how improvisation can transcend genres. Admittedly, Lewis's essay focusses on the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of multiculturalism in post-war American experimental music (2004:167). But before I delve into the social motivations of improvisation, I want to use his comparative approach to discern what is musically permissible, possible, and practical. I use Lewis's comparison of Afrological and Eurological forms because it (superficially) follows my own interactions with improvisation. Crucially, Lewis states that '-logical' is not synonymous with '-centric'. Thus, his

conceptualisation does not undermine the attempt to articulate 'transcendence' that isolates the improvising musician and his/her music. In line with his description of these forms as 'historically emergent rather than ethnically essential', I am able to account for the transcendence of improvisation without denying the reality of my ethnicity or race. This is critical in articulating a creative practice that is reflective of not only my identity but also of the nature of improvisation.

I attempt to enrich my improvisational language by participating in contemporary classical music and free improvisation projects. My first experience was performing in the New Music Ensemble during my undergraduate jazz studies; my second was playing with the London Improvisers Orchestra more recently. In both cases, the practice of free improvisation allowed me to operate without the burden of the violin's marginalisation within jazz. Unlike in jazz, where classical technique seemed (to me) to impede stylistic improvisation, free improvisation gave me the licence to think less about what notes to play and more about how to play – and how to improvise. Creativity in jazz need not be 'mechanical freedom', and parallel criticisms have been levelled against free improvisation: Gavin Bryars calls it a 'sham' (Bailey, 1992:113). Both models have proved relevant to building my jazz language on the violin and I persist in both practices. Although jazz improvisation remained my goal, I discovered new ways in which the violin could participate musically. As it stands, the leap from jazz improvisation to free improvisation is not that far – and arguably both practices come from the same source. Furthermore, if I follow Lewis' articulation of transcendence through improvisation, the practice need not only be articulated by an 'American experience', but also, by the 'Pei experience'. I explore what these forms of expression can mean to me through how I utilize them in other projects.

Chapter 4 outlines the social landscape of my jazz violin practice. It focusses more narrowly on jazz because that has been the mainstay of my musical socialisation. As I participate in other musical improvising forms, however, I find equally complex situations arise from my participation. The most obvious issue is gender, which has been widely explored in jazz studies, mostly by female scholars. Some of the earliest texts, written by Sally Placksin (1982), Linda Dahl (1984), and Leslie Gourse (1995), focus on the role of women and their contributions to jazz. Sherrie Tucker (2000) and Kristin McGee (2009) trace all-girl bands in media from 1920s-1950s, while Eileen Hayes and Linda Williams' collection (2007) considers the intersections of race and gender in Black music. *Big Ears* (2008), edited by Nicole Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, explores the issues more broadly, in terms of jazz historiography, embodiment in jazz and improvisation, and new jazz representations. Even gender bias in jazz authorship has recently come into question, in a conversation on women in jazz journalism (Jazz Journalists Association, 13th January 2018). A new platform, 'Jazz Herstory'[1], was recently established to 'explore and address gender equality in jazz'; but it rather undermines (and isolates) its own efforts by seeking to bring jazzwomen to a 'balanced foreground' without considering how men can be part of the fold. Surely, gender equality is for all, not just women. Yet, my research does not propose to interrogate gender policies per se. Rather, I explore ways in which jazzwomen have negotiated gender discrimination in their practice and how their strategies compare to mine.

There is no shortage of examples of gender imbalance in jazz and my story will not be one that is unique or exceptionally discriminate. Most resources on jazzwomen are generated by women and this cautions me from retelling a familiar narrative. Instead, I seek

[1] https://www.jazzherstory.co.uk/press

out other issues in my own experience that may directly or indirectly contribute to gender bias. Furthermore, reading interviews of jazz women serves to highlight how variable our experiences are in how we perceive (and thus confront) gender bias. Texts by Wayne Enstice and Janice Stockhouse, *Jazzwomen: Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians* (2004), and by Chris Becker, *Freedom of Expression* (2015), are among the few that have extensive interviews with jazzwomen. In some of these interviews, the question of gender bias does not arise, while in others, it is a major point of contention. I found similar conclusions in my interviews. Collectively, they cause me to consider my own gendered assumptions about female musicians; and by extension, how I understand my gender position in generating my creative work. My research thus explores how my identity and cultural environment intersect with the construction of gender in jazz – and how that indirectly affects my creative opportunities and thus, my creative decisions.

The social structure of creative practice is a discussion that is relevant for all instruments. Yet my research must focus on the violin for meaningful analysis to emerge. There is limited literature on the specific intersection of gender and race with the practice of jazz violin. I have derived my information primarily from interviews, while drawing also on studies of other instruments. My interviews with female improvising string players of various backgrounds, such as violinists Meg Okura and Tomoko Omura, and cellists Akua Dixon and Susanne Paul, have been important in offering varied perspectives. I also refer to Yoko Suzuki's paper *'*Two Strikes and The Double Negative*'* (2013), based on her intersectional analysis of gender and race among female jazz saxophonists. Her research, like mine, builds on her experience as an Asian, female jazz musician and offers something of a model. Other studies, by Lucy Green (1997) and Kathleen McKeage (2002, 2004) reveal the gendering of instrument selection, which in part accounts for the low rate of female

participation in jazz. While associations between instrument and gender should not in themselves dictate musical styles, jazz remains a genre concerned with the performance of identity. This relates to my earlier observation that 'being a jazz musician' is more than 'playing jazz'. To explore the distinction, I use my personal reflections as part of an auto-ethnographic process of practice-based research.

It is not sufficient to think of social experiences as bounded by gender – and jazz, more so than most styles, is defined by racialised expectations. Yet stereotypes persist even in supposedly democratic musical forms such as free improvisation. I noted with some bemusement the blurb promoting my performance with Veryan Weston and Bei Bei Wang at the Vortex Jazz Club in London (Figure 1), which listed the musicians as a pianist, a multi-percussionist, and a 'Malaysian violinist' – as if I play on a special kind of violin. More than that, our performance was described as 'contemporary improvisations reflecting their broad cultural origins'. While that must be true to an extent, my prior location by nationality and ethnicity essentialized my improvisation rather than recognising the complex, multi-layered, dynamic condition created by circumstances and collaborators. These are some considerations I explore indirectly in my creative process, thinking of what it means to be Self but viewed as Other.

# VERYAN WESTON'S : AS YOU HEAR

MON 06 AUGUST 2018, 8PM

BOOK ONLINE

£10

Pei AnnYeoh – violin
Veryan Weston – piano
Bei Bei Wang – percussion

Malaysian violinist – Pei AnnYeoh, pianist – Veryan Weston and multi-percussionist – Bei Bei Wang meet to perform contemporary improvisations reflecting their broad cultural origins.

Figure 1: Vortex blurb, 6th August 2018

## Self-Portraits

If the earlier parts of my thesis followed a more ethnographical mode of enquiry, Chapter 5 explores my creative practice from an auto-ethnographical position. My enquiry followed the shape of opportunity that arose in my creative practice; autonomous in structure and direction. The case studies I chose here represent my own experience in the context of the issues that I discuss in the earlier chapters. They do not reflect every aspect of my work during the research period, or the order in which projects occurred. Rather, they represent the activities that, taken as a whole, I find most interesting or productive to explore. That is, while the situations are contrived by my research activity, they stem more commonly from my creative interest and opportunity. In this way, my engagement with non-jazz/ non-improvised activities provide a more rounded creative experience that shape my overall

reflections. By means of these case studies, I explore how creative approaches rooted in the tradition of jazz are applied in differing contexts.

While my projects may not follow normative jazz practices, they reference the model of African musical improvisation which Chernoff glosses as 'the expression of individuality that subtly distinguishes an occasion within the context of tradition' (1979:126). I start here with a discussion of creativity. As a classically trained musician, I was under the false impression that creativity stops at adding *rubato* to the end of passages or dynamic contrasts to a Bach partita. Genuine creativity is reserved for the composer, whose genius the performer serves. In this tradition, many aspects of a composition cannot be altered and creative changes (if any are discernible) are usually understated. Works exist in a permanent state, invulnerable to the decay, which fosters an aura of perfection and exclusivity. In performance, musicians are confronted by creative genius but must restrain their selves. This is an ingrained doctrine for classical musicians who take pleasure in their accomplished performance of the composer's work.

Coming from such a background, my initial assumption about creativity in jazz was that it was found only in improvised solos. But this was a conservative view of creative work and, reflecting back now, a naïve assumption. It is true that solo sections are what makes each performance special. They are the equivalent of classical cadenzas, in which the soloist takes the limelight in a display of technical mastery and musical ingenuity. What makes such sections special in jazz is that they may also happen spontaneously. Jazz musicians do not practice specific solos prior to performance as classical soloists (with some honourable exceptions) do. Hobsbawm writes that 'it is not the object of jazz to produce works' of long standing but rather 'constant variety at a high level of excellence' (1989:129). This is the marker of creativity that I found irresistible in the practice of jazz. While solos remain

perhaps the most analysed parts of jazz performances, their predominance is challenged as musical forms becomes more complex. Solos are not the only improvised sections as improvisatory practices are worked into performances on every level. While we should not imagine that each rendition is completely new, it certainly has the capacity to be – and this potential of difference is where creativity resides.

Jason Toynbee (2012:166) offers a metaphorical picture of creativity in the form of a radius, in which the centripetal core is coded as normative practice. Drawing on Howard Becker (1982) and Arthur Koestler (1975), Toynbee considers how creative choices gradually move away from the core by means of three possible conditions: transgression of the norm, 'bisociation'/ synthesis of previously unconnected components, and anti-habitus which places the author at odds with the field. He describes these as mechanisms of creativity, but of course, creative acts are dependent on much more than position from the core. Creativity is only recognized as such when it is linked to a 'body of conventions' (Becker, 1982:30), or in other words, difference needs to be recognized (Toynbee, 2012:166). I thus seek to discover if the creative difference that is recognized in my jazz practice comes from a musical or a social standpoint. This is critical in determining the 'body of conventions' to which I subscribe. I seem to fulfil all three of Toynbee's conditions, with my transgression of the norm by playing the violin in a non-classical, non-folk context; my synthesis of classical violin technique and improvisation to create a distinct jazz language; and my marked social position in my creative circle (anti-habitus). While these categories doubtless simplify the issues, my case studies will offer particular details of transgression, fusion, and anti-habitus, albeit not in such terms. Rather, my projects explore my 'capacity for difference' as the creative quality of a jazz musician.

Thus, the information I document in the Portfolio represents (to an extent) the environment I was in and my proximity to potential creative collaborators. It was a situation that I could not have designed and whose outcome I could not have predicted. It is this very unpredictability that I feel has lent critical perspective to my creative process. The Portfolio materials are, as the subheadings suggest, 'Sketches' to the 'Self-Portraits' that I choose to present in Chapter 5. Therefore, the meaning that one might take away, going through the Portfolio material, is multi-layered and highly contextual. 'Audio', 'Videos', 'Links' and 'Figures' in the Portfolio directly reference particular issues and situations that I discuss in the thesis, while other resources listed in the Portfolio offer supporting evidence and contextual snippets of my creative practice at large. 'Recordings' document the projects as a whole and have multiple tracks to them. It is not necessary to listen to these as a whole to understand my points, but I hope the reader may choose to do so to get a broader picture of my creative representations in these projects.[2]

The case studies I select in this dissertation were undertaken in London between 2016 and 2018. With the exception of TriYeoh, which is a reinvention of an earlier ensemble, all these projects were new. They were undertaken both to fulfil my research agenda and to support my creative interests. These projects offer particular examples of my use of jazz in various musical contexts. Other performances (Portfolio: Programmes) are documented as evidence of my range as both a classical and a jazz violinist, but more importantly, to demonstrate the scene that I was involved in throughout the research period. Conflicts of identity may emerge when I play a variety of styles in one concert, or when I play different concerts for the same audience. But I do not participate in these events in order to explore

[2] Ethical approval was given by King's College London, Research Ethics Number: MR/16/17-65.

such issues or to pursue a particular creative agenda. I include them here to give the reader further context for the case studies on which I focus. If anything, I hope my range of work gives a ring of authenticity to my creative choices and locates me within my research context. Specifically, the paradox between creative practice and creative research is situated in all these examples as I navigate between research-relevant material and creative-relevant activity. In analysing creativity in my practice, I reflect on Hobsbawm's criteria of 'constant variety at a high level of excellence' (1989:129). Although my specialisation is in jazz, I have had to adapt the performance style for the violin. This has involved rethinking and reimagining a jazz sound, distinguishing it from the styles I have been taught, by tutors who were either violinists or jazz musicians, but very rarely both. Thus, the pursuit of difference is a natural condition of jazz violinists, as comes across in my selection of creative projects.

The first case study considers my time with the London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO). Prior to my experience with the LIO, I came across an online project, curated by Julie Kjær (2016), highlighting ten women improvisers, some of whom I was interested to interview for my dissertation.[3] Most of them had a connection with LIO which became further impetus for me to participate. However, my experience with the orchestra led to me to reflect on an issue more basic than improvisation – how to be heard. Through this, I came to re-evaluate the social capacity of free improvisation and the value of collective creative engagement. I describe my experiences in detail, trying to engage musically while maintaining sufficient distance to capture my experience as research.

For a long-established orchestra, the LIO provides little information on how to participate and my initial enquiry elicited no reply. Eventually, my entrance into the

[3] https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/GAJyUfGPq0lXLg

community was by recommendation from another musician. But practice proved necessary in getting further access to other research and creative opportunities – such as, performing with improviser Veryan Weston and having a guest solo spot at Mopomoso.[4] In a fortuitous turn of events, my performance with Veryan Weston at monthly Mopomoso gig at The Vortex (15th April) led me to be invited as a guest soloist at the Mopomoso workshop in Sevilla Mia (16th April).[5] These are some of the instances in which my practice led to other creative opportunities, indirectly enriching my research material. My research enquiries would have ended sooner (or not taken off at all) were it not for my creative practice which expanded my research account. My position in these various contexts would be harder to access as a researcher; while as a musician, these activities naturally grew out of each one based on my creative practice. It is an affirmation of practice-based research and auto-ethnography as central to researching music practice, creating opportunities that would otherwise not have been available to me.

The second case study stays closer to my jazz roots (if I may consider myself to have jazz roots): my jazz ensemble, TriYeoh. It is an ensemble I established during my postgraduate days with newly-graduated students from the jazz course at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, UK. However, several years have passed since then resulting in personnel change, and I was left pondering how I could incorporate this ensemble into my research. A period of inactivity had not blunted my sense of improvisation though I was apprehensive about whether I could rebuild the same ensemble. Not that 'the same' is a standard that I aspire to creatively, but TriYeoh was a successful ensemble and I would have

[4] Mopomoso is one of the longest-running improvisation workshops in London, established in 1991 by John Russell and Chris Burn.

[5] Veryan-Pei recording at the Mopomoso monthly gig (Portfolio: Recordings – Veryan-Pei Duo)

regretted losing it for any reason. Evan Parker's experience resonates here: 'The people I've played with longest actually offer me the freest situation to work in' (Bailey, 1992:128). The musical assurance that each member provides to the ensemble gives us the opportunity to explore and to take creative risks. TriYeoh is an ensemble that has largely defined my creative process. I consider the social cues that inform the ensemble, how they have influenced our music, and my direction within the group. I discuss how familiarity with one's work and with each other's styles fosters creativity and deeper musicianship. Through it, I was able to find a musical context in which I felt comfortable to participate – be it for my gender, ethnicity, or instrumental minority. The ensemble continues to explore a jazz violin practice but circumstances, such as a new member and a research agenda, meant that some aspects of our creative work have had to be adapted. Improvisation, then, becomes the key in establishing the dialectical nature of our creative practice.

My last case study considers a group on which I had no research designs, but which gradually became relevant to my work. This ensemble, The Goodenough Band, does not always use a violin, but it connects to my research through other factors, namely improvisation and genre diversity. To offer a brief context of the band: we live together in a postgraduate student college and met by chance, volunteering to play music for a Diwali event. On this occasion, a French-Canadian scientist (who plays the acoustic guitar) and a Malaysian violinist were the only backing musicians for an event led by the Indian-Pakistani community. The third and final member is Emanuel Heitz, a Swiss opera singer who plays the electric guitar and writes original music, some of which we play alongside pop covers. I offer our nationalities as well as our instruments as it contributes to the sense of our mutual differences. Of the three of us, only Marc is a non-trained musician and the lead singer. For a long time, we jammed together in the configuration of acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and

violin. Since the pop-rock songs we played had no specific role for a violin, I tended to play counter melodies and occasional solos. Looking for new creative outlets, I began to add other instruments, which made the project relevant to my research. This multi-instrumental approach questions the pre-eminence of my violin in the ensemble, while enhancing the texture with improvisation of other kinds. In this way, I also encounter various social misconceptions about my creative practice by separating my identity as a jazz musician from that as a violinist.

These three case studies provide useful resources for analysis, taking care to note the distinction between performances by these ensembles and their documentation as research. Subsequently, research materials take two forms: firstly, evidence of the outcome – typically a recording; and secondly, documentation of the process (Emmerson, 2017:34). This prose account will serve to locate both in my research. Thus, performance is not necessarily a research activity in and of itself. Hodges clarifies that: 'the reflection on varied approaches, the evaluation of different methods, and the proposition of a unique approach based on this investigation, implementation, and evaluation' is the targeted research outcome (2017:92). Emmerson adds a healthy dose of realism on how much originality and knowledge will result (2017:34). Drawing on Borgdorff's (2012) observation that little of genuine originality is present in published research across all disciplines, Emmerson tempers expectations of breakthroughs in creative research. In fact, performance 'failures' are as much a part of the creative process as successes, even as it is unusual for professional musicians to wish to document them. Failures give clarity to the process and are a vital reference for future researchers. This is a critical point in understanding artistic research: while creative work may carry the expectation of novelty, originality, and success, it should

not be measured in the same manner as research work, in which the process may be more significant than the sounding result.

The selection of these case studies was not to uncover a method of being a jazz violinist, or a female musician, or even an Asian musician in a Western European context – though each deals with those very issues to differing degrees. I hasten to add that it is not possible for me to measure the degree to which I might feel affected by them in my creative process. The responses I received to these issues from my ethnographical work offer answers that are naturally subjected to various contexts. Thus, the research investigation cannot be expressly constructed to answer them. Rather, these issues emerge from my creative practice, feeding into the research. It seems to me that a good litmus test for this project is in response to authenticity and belonging. How am I, in comparison to other musicians, practising jazz violin authentically and not just creatively? Why is jazz the best expression of musicianship for me and how does it help me explore other boundaries in developing my creative practice? I hope the case studies demonstrate the extent of my creative intentions without giving in to banal research-led impulse of 'experiment'.

Thus, authenticity is the final case in point for generating new insight in artistic research. Difference, which is a key element in any creative work, is present everywhere in music. But 'difference' alone is an insufficient condition and looking at music as an object points to an inchoate sense of a wider territory (Middleton, 2006:205). For me, this 'wider territory' represents the position I currently occupy as a practitioner-researcher. That is, in validating my aims, I have come to recognize that offering a variety of performances is insufficient to the demands of creative work, and inconsequential to my research work. I cannot answer 'why jazz?' by saying 'here's all the jazz I do', because the reply would invariably be 'so what?'. Hodges reminds us that 'the cause is not either-or but open-ended'

(2017:94) and Ellis shows that it is the essence and meaning of creative work that auto-ethnographers must document, not an assembly of facts around and about that work (2004:116). I recognise this with my conviction that playing jazz is not the same as being a jazz musician – and therein lies my grapple between creativity and authenticity.

The research is more nuanced than documenting novel processes that my creative practice transcends in presenting original material. I would like to suggest that authenticity be the pivoting point in artistic research. If research is valid when its methods can be replicated in other investigations, creative practice is valid when its process is not replicable by another musician. Even as I search for the meaning of creativity and difference through my jazz practice, I am cautious about the conceptual appropriation of jazz that Ingrid Monson calls 'white hipness' (1995) – conscious of how easily it could be attached to me, white or not. Despite that, it is possible to replicate certain modes of practice but the approach to practice must remain personal and contingent to each musician – authentic, in other words. Throughout this investigation, I mark out stages which derive from methods developed by other practitioners. Yet I retain a creative trajectory that is entirely my own, built on my circumstances – strengths and weaknesses, curiosity and compulsion.

# Chapter 1 - The Practice: Jazz Violin

## 1.1 At Jazz School

An educational institution may seem an unnatural place to work out creative aspects of jazz. However, the increasing number of jazz programmes indicate that formal training has a part to play (Murphy, 1994; Suber, 1976). The inroads made in jazz education since the 1950s have been celebrated as a sign of jazz's acceptance as 'serious art'. Education has had two important consequences on the jazz art world (Lopes, 2001:238-239). Firstly, institutions open up a new audience for jazz, beyond those that frequent clubs — audiences from a different class, race-ethnic, and social background, for whom the music's legitimation is important. I will raise a hand in support of education's role in broadening the scope for a new sound and prospects of a new audience. After all, my own 'unlikeliness' as a jazz musician is in an example of education's social impact. Secondly, institutions serve to recruit new talent in the context of an increased division between popular and jazz forms that could easily lead to waning numbers and creative redundancy. While there are criticisms to be made about formalized teaching, the scene is dependent on young, highly trained musicians who continue the progression of jazz.

The trend among players is certainly from the street to the school. This is not to say that jazz learning no longer takes places outside of institutions; informal propagation continues alongside, with resulting clashes of style. It seems to me that the jazz community develops primarily within educational establishments, with institutionally approved methods, while still engaging creatively with musicians outside. David Ake writes that a new generation of musician/ teachers 'increasingly consider the college classroom, rather than neighbourhood sessions, to be the prime training ground' (2002:264). His chapter

investigates perceptions of 'serious' music when jazz taught at conservatoires and institutions resorts to a 'jazz has all of the things that classical music has' approach (p.265) – serving to elevate the status of jazz while also colliding with idealistic values of the genius improviser. It outlines how the 'natural expression' of jazz involves a type of practical knowledge that is not entirely congruent with an academic approach. All these issues seem to parallel my general concern of being able to play jazz but not being seen as a jazz musician.

When I was first deciding on where to audition for my undergraduate degree, my sister made the whimsical suggestion that I audition for a jazz programme. This was such a far-out idea that it would never have occurred to me to consider jazz violin as a legitimate study. Yet, the more I thought about it, the more I understood her reasoning. Jazz (for a violinist, anyway) has untapped market potential and the classical scene is inundated with graduate musicians, competition winners, child prodigies, and the like. Joining that pool would mean an unending battle for me, to the bitter end. It helped that my sister is a professional violinist, with a decade of experience on me. She could foresee that my following in her footsteps would lead to a predictable end. I needed to be a game-changer. If tertiary education was to be of any use in the competitive performing arts industry, it should offer me this edge. Few conservatoires offered a jazz violin course, and the less said about the audition the better. I prepared my 'three-pieces-of-contrasting-styles' and awaited the result. In the end, I was accepted for both classical and jazz programmes and had to make a choice. My acceptance onto the jazz course came as a surprise, but the Head of Jazz explained that a second-year classical violinist also wished to pursue this direction. If there were two of us, the department could hire a violin tutor. At least, that is what I

assumed to be the reason for taking a chance on me. What did the department have to lose?

Joining the jazz programme, I was suddenly confronted by the tradition and its practices. Everyone, it seemed, had a lifetime of playing in bands, listening to jazz, learning the standards, and understanding the cues. In some ways, all I had to do (apart from take an occasional solo – a saga in itself) was to play the melody. But even this turned out to be not as straightforward as reading the score. There is no one way of playing a tune and any way seemed to be as good as the next. Intros might involve a simple count-in, or the last phrase of a section, or occasionally a 'vamp' (an open-ended repetition of a few chords to set up the groove). A vamp only ends when a frontline instrument (such as the violin) cues the melody. Immediately, I found cuing-in difficult, complex even. In classical music, cues-ins use simple instrumental gestures all in-sync: the lift of the violin, the gentle placement of bow, and away you go. In jazz, the oft-touted 'eye contact' is used, but how do you connect with the whole ensemble in time, before the vamp goes around again? Endings are not simple either. Rarely does a piece end at the double bar. There is usually a 'turnaround', which is a specific set of chords that effects a *da capo* of sorts. Sometimes 'tags' make a kind of Coda, perhaps by repeating the last phrase to end. By the end of my first ensemble class, I was internally yelling: Where *is* all this information on the score? Somehow my jazz peers were putting together a coherent performance from a melodic line, chord symbols, and 'eye-contact'. Was this really the first-year course? I knew I had to play catch-up but didn't expect to feel this useless and lost. Is there anything worse for a musician than being unable to play music?

Ken Prouty considers the potential damage of mismatched skill levels within an ensemble by asking how to manage expectations of jazz practice while fulfilling educational

commitments (2012). For example, student ensembles are usually organised by year level or instrumentation, which may not accurately reflect experience gained outside the institution. That is, a first-year drummer who has already been gigging for twenty years will not find inexperienced classmates ideal partners in learning, but to skip the ensemble module is to risk academic failure. This tension between 'institutionally defined communities' and 'organic, emergent communities' often disillusions students who attend music schools with expectations of 'real' experience. Hence, the criticisms that structures of education and realities of musical practice are incompatible. Still, jazz ensemble modules are often set up to replicate jam sessions. While there is likely a department tutor, there is also some freedom for students to select the repertoire and direct the ensemble. Even the varying levels of technique and experience mirror a typical jam session. Such an environment is ideal for musicians to learn organically from one another – and there is no shortage of examples that demonstrate how the jazz community builds its own up, as I show in later chapters.

My jazz school tried to mould me to fit a standard model of learning. As Gabriel Solis points out, the 'problem of genre' determines how we approach improvisation. That is, the pedagogy typically produces 'idiomatic players of specific genres' (2016:96) – and there is nothing more idiomatic than jazz improvisation. One of the difficulties was finding a suitable tutor. While I was put through the same rigorous exercises and repertoire as my peers in class, I was dancing to a different tune in lessons, because my teacher did not have a jazz background, or follow the same pedagogical methods. My violin tutor at this time is known as a prolific improviser and composer, with a solid classical background. His knowledge of jazz is by token of his ability to improvise, but he is not trained or 'rooted' in the jazz tradition. Assigning me an improvising violinist but not a jazz musician highlights the close

association of improvisation with jazz. Yet I was left out of that loop of jazz pedagogy because the violin does not have the learning structure (or it seems, instructors) of standard jazz instruments like the saxophone or the piano. While I did not know it back then, I have come to realise how my unorthodox training shaped me to be the player I am today.

Upon reflecting now in my writing process, I want to demonstrate how the same message came about in both my practice then and in my research activity now. When I first started jazz violin, I approached lessons as boldly as I could, believing that I just needed the right attitude to learn. I kept telling myself that improvising would get easier, that I would begin to formulate more sense in my playing, and that I would stop feeling like an imposter in jazz. As it turned out, my tutor could not offer me much by way of a jazz language. Furthermore, Berliner writes that improvisation is defined more by what it is not than what it is; and so too, my tutor would tell me only what sounded good or bad, not what I should do. He was knowledgeable about violinists I should listen to (Stuff Smith, Billy Bang) and harmony books I should check out (Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*), but these did not form the basis of his teaching. Lessons were rather free-form, largely directed towards what I wanted to achieve. Needless to say, I was too anxious about my short-term aims of playing well in the next ensemble class and my end-of-year recital to think about long-term goals. As I was just getting myself going with jazz, I appreciated a lack of criticism of my every move (which had so often characterised my classical lessons). I enjoyed the freedom and openness in what I chose to explore in my improvisations on jazz tunes.

After a term, however, my tutor concluded that I needed better classical technique. It was clear that I have good ears and a natural sense which notes to play, but I lacked finesse on my instrument. This comment came back to haunt me recently at the Seifert Jazz

Violin Workshop which I undertook in the summer of 2017. Although some years have passed since my undergraduate days and I have progressed significantly in both technical competence and jazz stylistics, the verdict of lacking perfect facility still applies, same as it would to a classical player. Competency on one's instrument is a given of professional practice and is built on technical excellence. Yet, it seemed to me that any progress I made stylistically with jazz was made irrelevant by the never-ending search for perfection in playing my instrument required by my teachers. But what form should that take for a *jazz* violinist? As it turns out, for some practitioners at least, 'jazz violin' is a myth.

## 1.2 The Myth

There is jazz, and there is the violin. They should be viewed and learned as two separate entities. This is Mario Forte's philosophy.[6] In other words, it is not possible to learn 'jazz violin' as one would jazz saxophone or jazz piano. It boils down to how the violin is played and the thornier issue of what jazz is in the wider imagination. Some part of this results from jazz institutions' teaching of violin and the role of instrumental tutors in determining style. While it is common practice to learn from a master, jazz violinists are in short supply, no doubt reinforcing the idea that the practice itself is a myth. Should violin students have an improvising violinist as teacher, or a non-violinist jazz musician? The characterisation of jazz and improvisation as two distinctive styles will require further commentary. But for now, I want to consider how the division between jazz and violin studies may result from the technical impositions of the violin which differ from those of other jazz instruments. Even starting out as an improvisor, I always had an idea in my inner ear of what I wanted to

[6] Mario Forte is an associate professor of jazz at University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Being one of the prize winners of the 2nd Seifert Competition in 2016, he came back to lead a series of workshops at the Seifert Jazz Violin workshop in 2017 – where I had the opportunity to learn from him. In August 2018, he was awarded the first prize winner at the 3rd Seifert Competition.

play. As I gained more confidence and exposure to jazz, this capacity developed. However, I found my technical ability a hindrance to my creative instinct. I was so focussed on improvising that I abandoned a lot of violin technique (i.e. perfection in executing articulation, intonation, and tone) for the sake of my new jazz language – not that playing jazz excuses 'poor intonation' or 'weak articulation' but that I could not give these problems sufficient attention while also deciding *which* notes to play. My tutor was spot on: I had no problems playing the 'right' notes, just with playing right.

It is a given that playing the right notes does not necessarily equate to playing correctly. There is a great degree of rigorous training to master the instrument before considering musical imagination. Logically, the process is first to play right, then (as an improvisor) to play the right notes. Jerry Coker suggests that theory and technique are the 'basic tools' for creating improvised, or indeed any, music (1987:3-11). 'Playing right' also seems to set up 'playing the right notes', to the extent of negating wrong ones. I have often encountered audience members (musically trained and untrained alike) who marvel at a beautiful performance, apparently unaware of the wrong notes. To an extent, jazz allows for the limitations of one's technical ability. An advanced technique may be required for more intricate formations of notes and complex coordination of musical ideas, but it is not absolutely necessary unless it forms part of one's improvisational language. This is not to say that classical musicians are always technically superior to jazz ones, but jazz has traditionally been viewed as less demanding of technique. My experience in the jazz programme was that I was usually assessed on my ability to improvise, not on my technical ability on the instrument. Yet, when I am among violinists, including my teachers, the comparisons are always technical, especially if we are trying to execute similar ideas in improvisation. Perhaps similar conversations take place in workshops for pianists, bass

players, saxophonists or drummers, since these are logically the most conducive environments for instrument-specific critiques. But my exposure is to violinists—who, in a jazz context, often think that they are different.

But how does 'playing right' stand in the way of playing jazz on the violin? And why is the idea of a specifically 'jazz violin' thought of as a myth? It seems that the unnaturalness of playing jazz on the violin goes deeper than playing the violin well or knowing how to improvise. But I struggle to articulate precisely what aspects of instrumental tradition or musical style affect the process. For many years when first starting to improvise on the violin, I struggled to balance what I wanted to achieve, between regimented practice and spontaneous improvisation. Various sources agree on the difficulty of playing jazz on the violin but shed little light on how or why. Regina Carter admits that the violin is an instrument on which one has to learn the classical method first, and unhelpfully continues that everything learnt in so doing seems like 'the opposite from jazz' (Malone, 2003). Gary Kramer writes similarly in the liner notes of Harry Lookofsky's recording, *Stringsville* (1959): 'playing well on the violin, from the classical point of view, is almost the complete antithesis of playing well in jazz'. Indeed, Lookofsky's recording is one of the few celebrated jazz violin recordings in the bebop style, but I was disappointed (and part-vindicated) to learn that his part was entirely written out. Here was the quintessential example of jazz performed idiomatically to technical perfection on the violin, yet it lacked the essential jazz characteristic of improvisation. The two qualities are seemingly difficult to integrate in practice.

I wonder if Mario Forte frames 'jazz violin' as a myth in order to impress upon young players such as myself the gap between what we imagine ourselves to be (based on the example of other violinists) and what we can or should explore in our own practice. The

examples of jazz violinists such as Jean-Luc Ponty, Mark Feldman, Regina Carter, on one level, serve to debunk the myth. On another, their examples highlight the gap between what was known to practitioners previously, and what they chose to explore and pursue creatively – metaphorically crossing the mythic bridge. These musicians' creative position is one that acknowledges past masters by breaking new ground for improvising violin practices, offered a model of myth-busting to me. My research seeks to straddle past and present jazz violin practices while developing my own jazz practice and creative form.

## 1.3 The Sound

In digging deeper to understand the myth, I ask: how can I sound like a jazz musician on the violin? The violin is not new to jazz. It was used extensively in early New Orleans jazz and ragtime bands, but the softness of its sound prevented it from developing in style alongside the horns. In fact, the violin's participation was quite fashionable, emulating the Viennese *kaffehaus* tradition of a 'stand-up fiddler' (Berendt & Huesmann, 2009:519). One of the earliest pioneers of jazz violin, Stuff Smith, is said to have 'translated the spirit of jazz to the violin' (Fine, 2009:29). Known for his punchy tone and swinging feel, he was one of the first to amplify the violin and to forgo classical vibrato – developing one of the earliest aesthetics of what a jazz sound is for the violin. However, what 'classical vibrato' means here lacks concrete definition, and Smith's has also been unhelpfully described in contrast as 'heavy vibrato' (Berendt & Huesmann, 2009:520). It is not a vibrato that I could emulate, or more importantly, want to.

The give-away of a classical violinist trying to play jazz is the sound of their vibrato. The vibrato is the first thing that captures the ear, more so than the selection of notes. Jean-Luc Ponty reveals that, when cutting his first solo album, he stopped using vibrato altogether in an aim to emulate John Coltrane's sound (Glaser & Grappelli, 1981:124; Deller,

2018). Similarly, critics were struck by the 'dry, vibrato-less tone' of Nigel Kennedy's album *The Blue Note Sessions* (Hickling, 2006). In my initial forays into jazz, I made a conscious effort to avoid the use of vibrato on every held note (as I would do in classical repertoire). Listening to Stephane Grappelli and Regina Carter (my early references for a jazz violin sound), their vibrato is so well integrated in their overall sound that it is difficult to imitate, or indeed, to compartmentalize as discrete aspects that may be adopted. It is more than just a classical or jazz-type vibrato but an overall tone of performance that I wish to achieve. Eventually, I admitted to myself that a beautiful vibrato is the only recourse when notes are hard to come by. That is, when improvisation is proving impossible, a classical violinist will play everything classically 'pretty' – as if to compensate for the poor choice of notes. Stuff Smith affirms this position in a roundabout way when he explains: '(…) you can't afford to [vibrato] in jazz; your thoughts and your notes come too fast when you play jazz' (Glaser & Grappelli, 1981:16).

What I came to realize was that any vibrato has to be integrated with the choice of notes and the construction of phrases. In other words, a classical-type vibrato might be effective when paired with notes and phrasing that make it stylistically appropriate. For example, Regina Carter drifts in and out of classical repertoire and jazz improvisation on her album *Paganini: After a Dream* (2003) without fundamentally altering her vibrato or sound.[7] She does not sound like a classical violinist trying to 'jazz' things up, nor a jazz violinist showing off classical technique, but is able to fuse the sound worlds seamlessly. The musical arrangements and repertoire choices are also intelligently made to showcase the stylistic

[7] In December 2001, the people of Genoa chose American violinist Regina Carter to perform on Paganini's legendary Guarneri violin 'The Cannon' at their annual festival and then donated the proceeds to the 9/11 Fund. This recording was made 10 months after the concert on the same instrument.

blend. The highest goal for any jazz musician is to develop such a 'signature sound', which is unmistakably recognizable (Berendt & Huesmann, 2009:193). Yet the question remains: how does one develop a jazz sound when learning the violin is so deeply rooted in classical technique? Can one craft this sound by practising improvisation, or by some other means?

Matt Glaser, chair of the string department at Berklee College of Music, credits Stuff Smith with reinventing the violin for jazz because: 'prior to that, there really were only two ways to play the instrument – either in a folk, fiddling kind of way, or in a Western classical kind of way'. He also regards Smith's style as owing 'the least debt to Western European classical tradition of any of the jazz violinists' (Fine, 2009:29). However, other influential early jazz violinists such as Joe Venuti and Eddie South, create their own sounds and generate new ways of playing jazz violin based on their classical training. Their success in modifying classical technique for various musical styles indicate the necessity of a strong technical base. Furthermore, Berendt and Huesmann's chapter (2009) on jazz violin cites many international violinists and the styles they have explored, concluding that Europe was influential in developing a jazz violin style, stating: 'No other instrument in jazz has as many European players as the violin' (p.529). Perhaps this demonstrates the reliance of the violin on a European instrumental practice, both technically and stylistically. Stylistic reference may be the more intriguing aspect because of the association of jazz to an American aesthetic, rather than a European one (even if such differences are difficult to articulate, especially as I stand outside of both of them). However, references of instrument to musical style validates Glaser's comments about Stuff Smith's playing and offers further impetus to my search for an approach as a jazz violinist.

Other American violinists such as Billy Bang, Leroy Jenkins, and Mat Maneri engage the violin in free jazz by employing unusual textures and sound effects that also rely on

extended classical techniques. Another example is Dutch violinist Michael Samson who performs with Albert Ayler's group, using the violin in an idiomatic Western European classical way with double- and triple-stops, arpeggios, harmonics, and pizzicato. The effect creates unconventional harmonies and textures, possess a 'trace of classical accent', showing that jazz violinists can never make a complete break with the classical roots of the instrument (Berendt & Huesmann, 2009:525). Leroy Jenkins, who recognized the unavoidable classical attributes of the violin, transferred it into free improvisation without compromising on the traditional rules of violin playing and harmonic language, even using the violin as a percussive instrument. Mark Feldman is another example of a violinist who does not play against the classical heritage of the instrument or try to 'saxophonize' the violin. Instead, he pivots between genres and expressiveness, between 'schmaltzy' and harsh lines – and is described as having 'an instantly recognizable sound' (528-9). These examples show the many possible aesthetic layers to jazz violin performance. Despite being rooted in the classical tradition, the performance styles of these violinists are very much associated with jazz. Their examples throw up problematic ideas about how to construct my jazz sound. Clearly, sounding 'like jazz' involves more than just using advanced classical technique, but the development of sound and identity of jazz is difficult to achieve.

Again, the issue of a jazz sound parallels jazz improvisation in that it is defined more by what it is not than what it is. Sometimes, contradictions arise in comparing violinists. In an interview with Wayne Enstice, Regina Carter was asked if one had to sacrifice tonal quality to play jazz (2004:72), which may have been a misunderstanding of a jazz violin sound set up by earlier violinists. Carter plays with a dark, beautiful tone – testament to a classical training. Yet no one will argue that Stuff Smith, with his aggressive, scratchy sound on the violin, was not a jazz violinist. Still, Carter is unable to offer further specifics on

Smith's playing: 'whatever it was, no one's been able to do that since' (Fine, 2009:29). This is unhelpful as I try to draw out specifics of a jazz sound for the violin, which seems to be related to classical instrumental technique in a way that other jazz-typical instruments are not. Billy Bang admits that violins are unable to compete with horn players in a jazz setting: 'why would you replace a trumpet or saxophone if they are doing a fairly good job?' (p.30). I take this to mean as a reference to sound, not instrumental roles which are identical.

So, what does it take for the violin to be accepted and competitive in jazz practice? Berendt and Huesmann's chapter (2009:519-530) on jazz violin offers a broad survey of violinists around the world, covering periods from early jazz to fusion and contemporary jazz. Even so, their descriptions emphasize the variety of styles played and the musicians' virtuosity more than their sonorities. For them, 'jazz violin playing experienced its greatest boost as a result of the explosion of the stylistic diversity in the jazz of the nineties' (p.527). What I take away for my own creative practice then is to explore stylistic plurality with technical fluidity – of which the violin is more than capable. This is a result, primarily, of the immense technical variety of the instrument, which is able to produce lyrical lines, drones and chords, percussive effects and can be either bowed or plucked. If, as Billy Bang says, there is no replacing the horns with violins, it is because horns are somewhat one-dimensional while violins are more versatile – and thus may be perceived as stylistically unstable, even unsuitable. The issue could also be viewed in terms of the deeply rooted association of sound to style (in the same way that the sitar is indelibly associated with Indian classical music). I am not implying that jazz's relatively stable instrumentation has held it back, but the creative potential of the violin in a jazz practice is immense. Why fixate on horns when it is possible to expand not only the stylistic boundaries of jazz but also the range of applied musicianship?

What this requires of the jazz violinist, then, is to possess a broad technical palette of the highest order, able to adapt to myriad styles. I observed an example of this when I attended a duo concert by Joshua Redman (tenor saxophone) and Ola Kvernberg (violin and viola) at Wigmore Hall (11th September 2018).[8] The performance allowed me to make a direct comparison between these two lead instruments in jazz, in a way that is not possible in a standard jazz ensemble. Without a rhythm section, the violinist displayed far more variety in technique and tone than the saxophone, playing both harmonic and melodic roles. Using amplification and effects such as loop and octave pedals, Kvernberg offered a variety of string technique such as pizzicato, double, triple, even quadruple stops (with a loosened bow, wrapped around the body of the violin) to accompany the saxophone, in addition to melodic solos and blended lines alongside Redman's powerful saxophone sonorities. The performance was compelling for its virtuosity, tightly improvised moments, and stylistic variety. It also reinforced my belief that the saxophone is an instrument that is sonically one-dimensional against the variety possible on the violin – and this is strongly driven by the technical possibility of the instrument.

Blending styles seamlessly requires not just technical fluency but also musical imagination, to formulate one's own practice. If specific pieces, genres or styles require particular techniques, then it makes sense that creative musicians will forge technical stylings for their own brands of music-making. Technical expertise and artistry are complementary elements, and in evaluating jazz performance as research, most analyses use creativity as a key performance indicator (Deutsch, 2016; Fischer et al., 2016; Burke & Onsman, 2017). Burke and Onsman define creativity as the 'creation of new expression, new

[8] A similar performance at Victoria/Nasjonal Jazzscene, Oslo: https://youtu.be/aHjy38LR6Ns

sequence, new melodic structure' and measure its success as a technical accomplishment. Yet, there is no argument in performance that a high level of creativity assumes a high level of technical expertise (2017:211-2). In other words, creativity can exist without a high level of technical skill – even as technique is necessary in executing creative ideas.

The interconnection between creativity and skill is such that greater technical expertise makes creativity more nuanced and less immediately outstanding – that is, 'the greater degree of performative expertise, the smaller the creative leap' (p.212). This is suggestive for what I have tried to express about jazz violin practice. The violin is tethered to a classical technique for the variety of skills this training provides. While it allows for a multiplicity of styles and creative pursuits, this foundation is problematic as it can limit the creative vision of the musician inasmuch as it dictates a musical standard. For example, jazz violinist Tomoko Omura is of two minds about technical excellence in light of her experience with creative improvisation.[9] On one hand, violinists with a strong classical training may be at a disadvantage in trying to improvise, because of the rigidity of their practice. On the other hand, Omura laments her lack of technical facility on the violin as a barrier to greater creative possibilities (personal interview, March 2018). But the balance between technical expertise and creativity in improvisation can only be subjectively assessed. Even then, a jazz performance draws on much more than technical expertise to improvise. It depends also on spontaneous interaction and collaboration with other elements of creative practice. Berendt and Huesmann, for example, say little about jazz violinists' relative technical abilities in remarking on the variety of performance styles (2009:519-530). Competence on the

[9] Tomoko Omura is a Japanese Jazz violinist, based in New York. In 2015, she was nominated as one of the 'Rising Stars' in *DownBeat* magazine. She was also a semi-finalist at the 2014 Seifert International Jazz Violin Competition.

instrument, one supposes, is a given. As Grappelli puts it: 'jazz is not difficult if you know your instrument well' (1981).

## 1.4 The Language

If playing the violin is not the issue, the focus may shift to learning the jazz language. Notes alone do not tell a story; they need shape and order akin to the logic of language. Jazz is deeply tied to improvisation, but the assumption that 'anything goes' does an injustice to the skill required to achieve musical significance in the spur of the moment. The emphasis in jazz improvisation as it is taught at conservatoires is on melodic and harmonic construction. There are two ways to approach this, through either theory-based or practice-based methods (Prouty, 2012:57); or, in the terms of Henry Martin, either 'analytical' or 'musician-based' approaches (1996).

While my research concentrates on my practice-based methods, my playing is founded in a theory-based approach. The combination of the two has served to enhance my results. Prouty affirms this approach but elaborates that each educator has different preferences (p.58). Indeed, as well as violinists, I have had lessons from pianists, guitarists, and saxophonists – and they all had different ways of teaching jazz improvisation. In these cases, it was the saxophonist tutors who used theory-based approaches, while the others preferred practice-based methods. Perhaps this was simply because theoretical approaches are translatable and applicable between front-line instruments which have similar instrumental roles. Whereas members of the rhythm section with different instrumental roles will have a different theoretical approach to their playing and can only offer a practice-based approach to my learning.

A theory-based approach emphasizes a fluent and advanced harmonic language through 'knowledge of scalar and/or chordal structures' (Prouty, 2012:58). To elaborate

further, David Demsey (2000) lists four elements of jazz improvisation – form and harmony, melody, voice-leading, and rhythm/time – each of which requires a firm theoretical grasp to employ effectively and creatively, especially in the spur of the moment. At the most basic level, a theory-based approach trains the ability to 'make the changes' – in other words, to improvise using the correct scales and modes for the harmonies. This approach perpetuates the practice of evaluating a musician's performance on the basis of playing the 'correct notes'. The old joke that jazz musicians cannot play 'wrong notes' because they are, in effect, the composer of the solo, ceases to apply. Indeed, there are over-arching rules about how harmony and rhythm function in jazz that serve to shape an improvisation, not with arbitrary runs of notes and vague phrasing, but with specific stylistic cues.

In the way we use and learn it, language offers a natural comparison to jazz improvisation. In conversation, we do not follow scripted words, but rather improvise using a set of grammatical rules and topical content. Berliner puts it succinctly: 'Just as children learn to speak their native language by imitating older competent speakers, so young musicians learn to speak jazz by imitating seasoned improvisers' (1994:95). This is an example of learning through a practice-based method, harking back to a time when jazz was firmly rooted in the oral/aural tradition. Jam sessions provide the space for such practice and – considering the natural extension of the linguistic properties – share also a dialectical way of improvising. Another practice-based approach uses existing musical resources, such as recordings or transcribed solos. Musical texts, either in the form of recordings or scores, allow musicians to learn the language of improvisation without encountering the social pressures of jam sessions. Renowned violinists such as Jean-Luc Ponty and Nigel Kennedy speak about the influence of Stephane Grappelli's recordings in shaping their styles of jazz

performance. Transcriptions are also widely used, not only to train the ear, but also to develop a jazz language naturally, by repetition.

While many players take their cues from jazz performances and recordings, the ability to listen and imitate lies somewhere between a natural proclivity and a trained skill. Regina Carter speaks about being 'given a gift' to hear and repeat music as a way of learning: 'You don't learn jazz by going into school and reading a book and taking a class' (Enstice & Stockhouse, 2004:66). She believes in listening to jazz records and learning from past masters how to solo and develop her sound. It should be noted, however, that Carter is a product of the Suzuki method of learning the violin. This is a teaching philosophy based on theories of natural language acquisition – the 'mother-tongue approach'. It is interesting to note how similar the Suzuki method is to the practice-based approach to jazz learning. While Carter's general perspective suggests jazz is an oral tradition requiring a natural feel for its mode of expression, solid aural training at least assists in that process. I relate to her on this level having also been taught in the Suzuki method and found from a young age a genuine ease in imitating music – something that I cannot credit to my tertiary education in jazz. It is no surprise then that classically trained violinists, such as Jean-Luc Ponty and Nigel Kennedy, may have an easier grasp of jazz articulations and sounds because of their technical abilities on the instrument and their advanced aural training. A theory-based approach, which I consider part of a formal musical education, likely enhances the outcomes of practice-based approach based in oral tradition. Indeed, Prouty cautions against considering jazz in its origins purely an oral tradition, given how many early jazz musicians were musically literate (2012:46). This reinforces the notion that effective jazz training may involve both theory and practice-based approaches.

I believe that the life-long process of music learning takes place in practice-based settings, but a broad foundation in music theory is necessary to support it. Even theory-based resources include method books such as the Jamie Aebersold's *Play-A-Long* series, Mark Levine's *The Jazz Theory Book* (1995), and David Liebman's *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody* (1991), which are worthwhile contributions to jazz pedagogy but require a basic practical facility to be effective. Books more specific to jazz violin pedagogy are Matt Glaser and Stephane Grappelli's *Jazz Violin* (1981), Chris Haig's *Exploring Jazz Violin* (2010), and Christian Howes' *The Violin Harmony Handbook* (2011), among others. However, there is an argument that theory-based approaches offer students a limited vocabulary that is effective only in specific repertory and does not translate well across differing structures of improvisation (Beale, 2000:760). Regina Carter remarks that jazz students now all learn the same vocabulary, playing a kind of 'institutional jazz' in which she hears 'stiffness'. She likens the process to cutting words out of a book and putting them in order, rather than formulating a sentence on your own (Enstice & Stockhouse, 2004:66). Nevertheless, Berliner finds that many professional musicians learnt to solo by transcribing and playing along to recordings – with some, like Art Farmer, saying that it is the best way of learning (1994:95-119). The hypothesis behind this copy-and-paste method is that once a musician has acquired 'the understanding and the technique to perform some of the greatest musicians' ideas, it would not be too long before he would be able to improvise his own solos' (p.97). Still, the question of *when* this ability will arrive remains difficult to predict; still more pressing is if an individuality of sound will result, and whether the outcome will show genuine creativity.

Transcription and replication of solos received a mixed reception among the jazz violinists that I encountered during my research. The 2016 Seifert International Jazz Violin

Competition winner, Mateusz Smoczyński, of Turtle Island String Quartet fame (2013-2015), for example, spoke openly about transcribing lines and patterns that he finds interesting for later use. He draws particular inspiration from Polish composer Karol Szymanowski's works, and even demonstrated a phrase and where he might use it. While it might be considered a cheap trick to quote lines and licks, Smoczyński admitted, it is better to be prepared than to fall short of ideas. One can hardly fault that logic, especially when he solos with such virtuosity and fluency. Then there is John Garner, a jazz violin graduate of the Guildhall School, who has note (and phrase) perfect examples of his work playing Charlie Parker's solos. Meticulous and impressive as these are, how much of such work could be integrated into one's playing without undermining personal creativity? As a student, I had to transcribe a solo for my aural class. The aim was not only to replicate the solo perfectly, but also to develop patterns and technical exercises from the transcription that could be incorporated into one's own playing. I never achieved that level of integration, but I created exercises from the transcription that became part of my warm-up routine, improving aural familiarity and finger dexterity. In another example, Harry Lookofsky's 1958 recording *Stringsville* features fast, intricate, bebop solos that mark him out as a prodigious violinist. But, as indicated above, his 'improvisation' had been written out and arranged for him (Kramer, 1959), serving to prove that playing the lines stylistically is a long way short of learning to improvise them spontaneously.

Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is: How (as much as it is 'who') do you want to sound when you improvise? Imitating great players is effective only to the extent that you want to sound like them. But should that be the aim of jazz improvisation? My experience at the Seifert jazz violin workshop in the summer of 2017 reflected many moments of conscious consideration of what our personal sound should be, either by myself

or by other participants in the workshop.[10] Numbering around twenty violinists from all around Europe, we became a closed-knit group, revelling in the unusual situation of being in the majority at a jazz workshop for once. Our teachers for the week included (among other notable string musicians) Mark Feldman, who gave us a whole sheaf of papers for his sessions: handwritten lines and patterns, song charts, and notes from other method books. Having listened to Feldman's playing for many years, I can usually recognize his violin on a recording. It might be the specific way he turns his phrases over, percussive riffs, string-crossing on a chord, or his syncopation. Feldman's music occupies an aural space in my mind but reading his licks on manuscript in a workshop made for a surreal encounter. In some ways, it shattered the illusion that I had of Feldman's improvisation, and it felt unnatural to sound like him rather than like me.

This experience taught me two things. The first was that I already have a language and a sound of my own. In other words, I have learned sufficient vocabulary to dialogue with other musicians. While new idioms may yet be useful, they arrive in the 'accent' of another musician, and I need time to naturalize unfamiliar vocabulary. The balance between pre-existing vocabulary and a personal sound needs to be carefully adjusted. Too commonplace and the playing lacks personality and creative interest; too particular and the music loses shared space in which others can interact with you. The second thing I learned was: it is not cool to replicate another person's playing. In any group, there is often a standout student, who grasps everything quickly and applies it almost perfunctorily. We had such a player among us, acknowledged for his superior technical ability; he even played his

[10] Named after the Polish jazz violinist, Zbigniew Seifert, the Zbigniew Seifert Foundation organised the first international jazz violin competition in 2014, running biennially. A jazz violin workshop takes place every other year in lieu of the competition. Mark Feldman has been part of the proceedings since its inception, being head of the competition jury and the main tutor of the workshops.

arrangement of Paganini's Caprice No.16 at one of our nightly jam sessions. However, his use of Feldman's lines and licks in his solos gave us some amusement. It was clear that he had given serious thought to the day's lessons and applied it with a degree of preparation in the execution of his solo. But it was not used as a quotation, as one often encounters in jazz solos. Rather, the pattern was applied pastiche-like and did not sound authentic or integrated with his own sound. Our exasperated smiles indicated no disparagement of his effort or his impressive musicality, but the unsatisfactory listening experience reaffirmed my belief that every jazz musician must cultivate their own sound.

An awareness that there may be losses as well as gains in crafting our sound is necessary to temper how we employ theoretical knowledge in our practice. It is unnatural to render accurately the notational excess of a transcribed improvisation since that is not the point of the exercise. Learning from a transcription or recording should mean replicating the 'spirit' of, not the notes (or patterns) of the solo. Part of the confusion stems from how jazz improvisation is taught at academic institutions, with a focus on a post-bop style (Solis, 2016:96). The stylistic rigidity and susceptibility to formulated method of bebop has allowed for the ossification of the jazz tradition through standardization of practice. This rigidity is further consolidated by the high value placed on technical expertise, especially at academic institutions, such that the 'spirit' of jazz improvisation may be lost (without invoking also the jazz violin myth). Derek Bailey comments that 'jazz (…) seems to have changed from an aggressive, independent, vital, searching music to being a comfortable reminder of the good old days' (1992:50).

Yet, there is an argument for such methods as saxophonist and composer David Liebman calls bebop the 'callisthenics' of jazz improvisation, offering musicians a 'flexibility to work in other styles in a coherent and harmonically sophisticated way' (Beale, 2000:760).

But Liebman's claim is quite far from the truth, at least for violinists, who often find bebop unsympathetic. The reasons for this are perhaps instrumental more than musical, and the sentiment is shared by most of my violin contemporaries. The violin's inability to keep up with the horns on a bebop tune keeps us out of the stylistic conversation around jazz improvisation. Part of the appeal of bebop is that solos are played at breakneck speed with some surprising dissonances. Sometimes it sounds as if horn players (saxophonists, in particular) just flutter their keys incessantly in the hope of feigning something close to John Coltrane's famous 'sheets of sound'. While this may be an impressive technical feat in itself, to produce all these notes at will, it is an easier effect to achieve it on the horn than on the violin. On the violin, no amount of finger fluttering can recreate such a sound, especially not with the same articulation. Violinists can be supremely quick and nimble, but most of their phrases are built on scalic/arpeggiac runs, or chordal patterns across the strings that move in the same shape. It is spectacular in its way, but it cannot achieve bebop's harmonic language or articulation, especially at a faster tempo. In this sense, the monopoly of bebop in the pedagogy of improvisation limits the creative range of jazz. Furthermore, the effectiveness and popularity of jazz violin has always been mainly in the swing style, in the early big band work of Ray Nance, Stuff Smith, and Grappelli's popular gypsy jazz style.

What transpires is the gradual isolation of bebop-based jazz improvisation from other forms of jazz. Some critics claim that bebop can be 'socially exclusive, competitive, emotionally narrow, and sometimes even racially divisive'. The technical and interpretational demands of bebop are 'too specialized' to be of wide use (Beale, 2000:760); or, as Solis puts it: 'the skills involved in improvising bop-style melodic lines over chord changes in a swing rhythmic language are not obviously transferrable to other musical settings' (2016:96). That is, unless bebop is the only style one wants to play, the

concentrated study it requires is musically limiting. As a successful bebop violinist, Benet McLean is in an unusual position and would not now want to improvise in another way (personal interview, November 2017). He has found methods of overcoming the inherent difficulties of the practice. McLean's background as a classical violinist and jazz pianist have helped to shape his bebop violin playing. His self-imposed exile from the instrument while he spent more than a decade playing pop and jazz piano is one of the more interesting aspects of his journey. McLean's abrupt transition from classical violin to gigging pianist offered him a practice of bebop untainted by the rigors of institutionalized jazz. McLean eventually transferred his piano lines to the violin, bypassing the horn-based idioms that are most commonly taught. This, I think, is one of the ways to accommodate bebop's stylistic language on the violin. Indeed, McLean's success is such that he has rebranded himself as a jazz violinist. However, true to my discussion above, bebop has somewhat limited his view of improvisation on the violin. He has no further interest in exploring swing, avant-garde, or free improvisation (personal interview, November 2017).

In constructing my own jazz sound and jazz language, I consider aspects of the jazz violin myth that I have encountered in my creative practice. Part of the mythical nature of jazz violin is based on the difficulty of learning the instrument which can only be mastered in the classical way. However, that only helps in producing a good tone. Following that, adaptations must be made to develop one's personal sound and language, requiring (sometimes, extreme) modification of years of practised technique. The ambiguity, and subsequently, diversity of what a jazz violin sound is (and could be) also deters other violinists. In considering the separation between jazz and the violin, I interrogate what jazz is, using the violin as a tool for accomplishing that. But jazz is not something that can be learned or explored in isolation, thus making the separation between jazz and the violin

unhelpful, and quite possibly, strengthening the jazz violin myth. The next chapter explores how collective learning and playing can assist in breaking perceived barriers for the violin, and seeks to discover possible creative roles for the violin in a jazz ensemble.

# Chapter 2 - How To Play With Others

The importance of playing a jazz language cannot be overstated; it is fundamental to communicating musical ideas in a comprehensible manner. Although each musician in an ensemble has his or her own lines and phrasing, their common denominator is the jazz language, which allows musicians to play together despite their differences. While the previous chapter considered how jazz is taught at institutions, this is about learning to play idiomatically – or as idiomatic as it can be on the violin. I compare formal modes of teaching jazz to vernacular ways of learning through jam sessions – and attempt to locate the difference between playing jazz and being a jazz musician.

## 2.1 Jam Sessions

Jam sessions have many functions, as enumerated by David Ake: 'guiding beginners through the earliest stages of musicianship, including selecting and instrument, learning fingerings and embouchures, note reading, technical exercises, as well as the idiomatic songs, sounds, licks, and other fundamentals of jazz' (2002:258). Various writers (Berliner, 1994; Lees, 1994; Porter, 1998) have considered how jam sessions serve as informal learning centres for younger musicians, observing their role models 'in nature', to experience subtle yet crucial aspects of performance, such as 'the feeling of effective swing groove, or the ways of group interaction on a bandstand' (Ake, 2002:259). Jams are one of the most 'authentic' ways to learn jazz but, despite improvisation's reputation as an equalizer, admittance is not a given. Social conventions come into play, spurred on by what can be quite a macho culture. As a result, I doubt whether jam sessions are suitable spaces for jazz misfits to participate. For the violinist, it may lead to ostracization; if not played like a horn or like Grappelli (the most

popular form of a jazz violin sound), the instrument is considered anomalous. For the female musician, jams may be a place of vulnerability, as participants are overwhelmingly male.

I find jam sessions complex spaces of power negotiation, in which the friendly competition between musicians may lead to attempts to out-solo each other. Berliner (1994) and Ake (2002) reference musicians who turn jams into 'cutting sessions'. In this context, there is a great deal of pressure to sound the most impressive – to play the fastest, loudest, and longest solos ever, and to turn a collective jam session into a platform for showboating. Of course, it would be too simple to say that jam sessions are testosterone-fuelled battles, or to discount the role that they traditionally played in cultivating players. Still, their temptations are real, both extending and undermining their ostensible purpose, of experimenting with new ideas and pushing the boundaries of one's skills.

Part of the 'power negotiation' of the jam session comes from directing the house band, especially if that too rotates through musicians at the session. Like most ensembles, a house band has to be led in some way to achieve a cohesive performance; in a jam session, this typically means giving brief musical directions (i.e. key, tempo, intro-outro, solo trades etc.). These instructions usually come from the frontline player, and I receive a more curious and accommodating house band to manage. As well as the lone violinist, I tend to be one of few females (the others mainly singers or pianists) and the only Asian musician (this is not the case back home in Malaysia, of course). At a jam session, having a violinist can be a bit disruptive. Other amplification adjustments need to be made, since the mic is usually intended for singers. Worse still if a violinist brings his/her own gear. There is a time lag in fixing up the leads to the system. A faux sound check (a.k.a. tuning) follows, carnivalizing the classical convention. By the end of all that, there is an air of expectancy in the room, as well as some hushed chatter. It is at this point that one has to deliver a set of instructions – all to

'jam' on one song. And then the performance: after that long build-up, the last thing I want to do is play poorly; in fact, I would want to play the fastest, loudest, and longest solo ever!

While musicians do use the jam session as an informal space to learn, they also exploit it to validate what they know. Participation at a jazz presupposes familiarity with general jazz cues and sufficient knowledge how to perform in that context. Even the accepted norms and values of a particular session may form part of the pre-knowledge of performance and behaviour expected of a musician who attends (Ake, 2002:258-259). In other words, as a beginner student, I could not have participated in a jam session even if I wanted to. Aside from the social pressures, no self-respecting musician wants to turn up with poorly formed ideas or lacklustre technique, because a performance is a performance, never mind how informal it appears – especially when the audience is made up of strangers. In this sense, jam sessions may be viewed less as a place of learning than as a social space for engaging with a network of musicians. Indeed, many musicians have founded their careers on a good performance at a jam session (Berliner, 1994; Ake, 2002). It is the best form of self-promotion. The gigs that may arise from a good session offer further experience, allowing the musicians to develop their styles and expand their networks – and so the cycle perpetuates. The importance of a good jam session and its professional impact cannot be overstated, and it would be imprudent to treat it as a workshop to learn how to play jazz.

Thus, an educational institution offers a more stable system of learning, in which proving oneself is largely left to the controlled setting of examinations. Formal education offers students written music, lecture notes, and music theory to put into practice (Beale, 2000:757) – and the learning takes place in a timely and structured manner. Students may hone their skills more effectively than in a jam session. Yet there are drawbacks. Some

studies have found that students who graduate from jazz courses sound too much alike because of their similar teaching and learning experiences (Beale, 2000:757). In other words, institutionalized training seems to eliminate some of a musician's creative spirit. Indeed, jazz tutors prepare their students for exams on a set curriculum of technical exercises and standard repertoire. Consistency of outcome is a measure of an education system's effectiveness. Students are expected to demonstrate similar standards of competence, making their creative practice and output quite homogenous. More crucially, the inherently flexible jazz language may become 'standardised' across the institution, such that the students graduating each year exhibit a similar performance style.

Some of the most distinctive jazz sounds may never have been achieved if the musicians were more formally taught (Beale, 2000:757). Miles Davis famously dropped out of Juilliard to join Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, and Thelonious Monk's unique sound, fostered by his unconventional technique on the piano, would never survive a conservatoire assessment. My own former teacher, the much-respected jazz pianist and composer Hans Koller, frequently laments his lack of technical training (Clowes, 2013; personal interaction). But what he 'lacks', he more than makes up for it with his advanced harmonic knowledge, his unconventional melodic lines, and his unshakeable internal time and feel for the music. These skills would not necessarily have been amenable to formal teaching, but developed more organically, sometimes out of his perceived limitations, can create a unique sound and style. This returns me to the jazz violin myth, in which the gap between playing the violin (classically) and sounding like a jazz musician remains frustratingly complex. Am I looking for a distinctive jazz sound that may be achieved through a regimented or 'schooled' training? Or should I give into my natural limitations (or inclinations) in developing a jazz sound? Even

so as a student, I was not looking beyond sounding 'like jazz' – I just wanted to *belong*, even if that meant sounding like the rest of my school.

## 2.2 Jazz Ensembles and The Violin

When I was in college, ensemble participation was both a requirement and a provision. Students were delegated to ensembles, which was more of a logistical shuffle than a sign of any artistic or social agenda. A somewhat unpredictable number of instrumentalists entered the programme each year, but there was a finite number of student ensembles. However, as music institutions mirror social reality, bassists are a boon for any ensemble – in a way that violinists never are. I am not sure if this 'shortage' is because less musicians choose to be bassists or that great bassists are hard to come by[11]. What is certain is that the bass has become essential to any form of music-making, not just in jazz. It is, perhaps, a mild point to make but I was envious about the certainty of belonging for some instruments. However, because of that, I am more zealous about how the violin can participate.

One benefit of institutional ensembles is that they largely resist the unpredictable social shifts that often beset jam sessions, cutting out musicians who do not belong to a clique. But this advantage must be tempered with an understanding of how academic institutions construct, organize, and assess transfer of knowledge to students in ensembles. Jazz courses are in the paradoxical position of seeking to standardise performance norms but still to nurture individual creativity (Ake, 2002:268). As one of only two jazz violin students, I felt that my placement in student ensembles had required some deliberation. The issue was not only where I would best flourish but also which ensemble could best

[11] The bassist in TriYeoh majored in jazz trombone but played bass as a second instrument. He graduated on the trombone but continues to be identified as a bassist not only because he is an excellent one, but because it is financially-rewarding too.

accommodate a violin; a balanced needed to be struck between individual and collective benefits. Student ensembles were led by an instrumental tutor, not necessarily a full-time department staff. The 'flavour' of the ensembles was dictated by the direction and specialisation of the tutor. Throughout my degree, the 'senior' jazz violinist and I were alternated between two ensembles each year – one which is a straight-ahead jazz ensemble and the other, the Latin Jazz Ensemble.

Musical communities within institutions foreshadow the jazz community outside, and social forces shape them both in similar ways (Prouty, 2012:44). Musicians who play together in college often continue to work together in their professional lives. This reinforces social relations established at an impressionable age and makes their educational experience the working model for a generation of musicians. As in any community, my fellow students would gossip about the cool groups to be in – and the uncool ones. The Latin Jazz Ensemble was as far off cool as could be, not least because its repertoire was not 'really' jazz in the ears of the more puritanical musicians. That is, it did not expose students to other styles of jazz such as bebop, swing, or even fusion. I played in the Latin Jazz Ensemble for two of my three years. To my delight, I found that the music lends itself nicely to the violin and improvising on it was the most comfortable I had felt in my short jazz life. More than that, I was unexpectedly familiar with the style – like an old sound from childhood. Some Malay folk tunes I grew up with have a Latin tinge, stemming from the country's Portuguese heritage in the colonial era. Of course, I did not know it then as 'Latin-influenced' or 'African-diasporic' music but the rhythms were familiar nonetheless. However, when I was placed in the Latin Jazz Ensemble for a second consecutive year, I began to feel type-caste, as students are typically rotated into other groups for a broader

experience and different tutelage. This caused me to question my position as an improvising violinist, and what forms of jazz might or might not be available to me.

Despite excelling in my instrumental lessons and having good harmony and aural skills, I did not yet feel like I had a legitimate position in jazz. Being 'left-behind' in the Latin Jazz Ensemble seemed to indicate that I have not progressed sufficiently to join another ensemble. I wanted to play in a jazz group, not a pseudo-jazz group. Prouty's discussion (2012, p.47) of how jazz education struggles to balance expectations of a 'real' experience with pedagogical requirements becomes telling in this case. As a third-year student, I felt ready for one of the more senior ensembles, regardless of the fact there was no predefined role for a violin. However, my teachers may have thought that I was well accommodated where I was, playing a genre in which the violin had proved effective. The reason for this stalemate was arguably a lack of flexibility and creative vision in institutionally formed ensembles. Such rigidity does a disservice not just to violinists, but also to other instrumentalists who are denied a learning opportunity. Since musicians' experiences in college are so formative of their professional lives, this perpetuates the marginalization that violinists face in jazz.

Incidentally, there was a 'reform' of the ensemble module later on my studies, whereby students could form their own ensembles. This was not required, but it was an option for students with similar interests who wished to play together. In retrospect, I should have taken up this opportunity, but I had yet to gain sufficient confidence in playing jazz, much less leading my own group. If anything, my experience thus far with ensemble allocation had led me to believe that I did not have the skills that would attract potential collaborators. Furthermore, I did not yet know what models there were for a violinist, short of succumbing to a 'gypsy jazz' cliché. This situation continued until my postgraduate

studies, when I formed my ensemble, TriYeoh (which I discuss at some length in chapter 5). For the moment, I want to share my experiences of working with Dave Holland and Chris Potter, on two separate occasions. These are prime examples how the violin can be used in jazz, without undermining its musical strengths, but expanding on its potential to create textural variety within an ensemble.

In 2012, I was among students from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire who gave a performance of Chris Potter's chamber-jazz album *A Song For Anyone* (2007) at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival (Portfolio: Link 1a, 1b). Potter's compositions and arrangements showcase a profound understanding of orchestration with a variety of tonal textures and timbres. The music is written for a tentet comprising a jazz quartet (saxophone, guitar, bass, drums) with trios of strings (violin, viola, cello) and woodwinds (flute, clarinet, bassoon). It was the first time that I had encountered such an unusual combination, not just in its use of orchestral instruments, but also in how each group relates to the rhythm section. In the original recording, most of Potter's sidemen/women are accomplished jazz musicians. But in the Cheltenham performance, only the rhythm section, clarinettist, and myself were jazz musicians. I felt as if my classical and jazz identities were colliding, as I gave directions to the string players on bowing and articulations to produce a jazz sound. The score was quite complete and sympathetic to non-jazz players, but some things cannot be notated, such as rhythmic 'feel', jazz articulation, or attack of the bow. Furthermore, playing in unison across the ensemble was something that felt new to the non-jazz musicians, especially in following direction from the rhythm section. It is an aesthetic that is familiar only when one has had experience playing jazz.

The Chris Potter Tentet bears comparison with other chamber jazz projects, such as the Max Roach Double Quartet, Dave Douglas' *Charms of The Night Sky* (1998), John Zorn's

*Bar Kohkba* (1996), Bill Frisell's 858 Quartet, and more recently, Esperanza Spalding's *Chamber Music Society* (2010) and Tyshawn Sorey's *The Inner Spectrum of Variables* (2016). 'Chamber jazz' is an imprecise term, referring to various fusions of classical styles, non-Western influences, and chamber forms, in a jazz style. Meg Okura, who leads her ensemble The Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble, considers the term to mean classical compositional styles and sound production employed in a jazz context (personal interview, March 2018). As my earlier exposition of the jazz violin myth shows, integrating classical technique with a jazz sound is challenging. Tomoko Omura thinks of 'chamber jazz' differently, as implying through-composed works for a mini-orchestra accompanying a jazz ensemble (personal interview, March 2018). As far as it relates to my creative work, I think of the term differently again, as music for orchestral instruments (such as the violin) that requires improvisation and jazz playing styles. I wonder if Okura's use of 'chamber jazz' is in part a way to avoid using her own name for her ensemble, instead loosely describing her practice. Unlike other such ensembles, which are short-lived projects cohering around a musician or musicians, The Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble is a permanent operation led by Okura and synonymous with her. Thus, the rationale behind 'chamber jazz' must be read differently in the context of Okura's practice, as I will explore later.

Another way to expand opportunities for the violin is to rearrange existing repertoire, such as occurred when I was a member of a student ensemble working with Dave Holland (Portfolio: Link 2). One of the highlights of the year at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire was Holland's visit as artist-in-residence. Students worked with him in two capacities: by bringing their own ensembles to an open workshop, or as members of a hand-picked group preparing a public concert. Only certain students were selected for these opportunities, and I was concerned that, as a violinist, I wouldn't come onto the radar. To

the school's credit, the other student violinist workshopped her ensemble with Holland, while I was assigned to rehearse and perform in his ad hoc group. The concert featured his own compositions, mostly from the albums *Critical Mass* (2006) and *Pass It On* (2008), neither of which feature a violin. During the workshop, Holland explained that he rearranged his music for our performance, given the unusual make-up of our ensemble, and he had sought to consider which songs might best serve our unique sound textures. The students involved fell into two group, one a fairly standard jazz septet, with three frontline horns and a full rhythm section; the other similar in shape but exchanging vibraphones for the guitar, and violin for the trumpet. Such an uncommon instrumental texture requires appropriate repertoire, not simply rearranging harmonic lines for the frontline instruments. To prepare for this project, we were sent only our parts with no indication of who would take solos in each song, so we prepared for all possibilities. When we had our first session with Holland, he already had an idea of solos which were evenly distributed, education being an equalizer of opportunities. My feature was 'Secret Garden' and I found it well suited to the sound and character of my playing – not to mention that it was the least 'bebop-y' tune in the concert. Unsurprisingly, Holland had the right instinct for what would be suitable for each ensemble across the programme. His orchestration was not arbitrary or formulaic but intelligent and creative, making best use of the instrumental resources available to him for this concert.

My experiences working with Chris Potter and Dave Holland cemented some beliefs I had been forming about jazz violin. Just as I was frustrated with my undergraduate ensemble class, I knew the solution was to create my own ensemble and write my own material. Playing in the Chris Potter Tentet demonstrated to me that material written for the specific instrumentation available offers the most creative and musical results. Such

unusual ensembles offer their own set of orchestration challenges, which cannot always be resolved by adapting big-band voicings. Furthermore, the violin is only a small part of a larger ensemble to lead and adapt which will involve developing multiple skills such as musical arrangement and ensemble management. Indeed, my main focus here is to resolve creative difficulties of the violin in jazz, not to find new ones. However, I do want to recall some string projects that have existed on the fringes of jazz performance, involving highly creative compositional and improvisational forms, that remain relevant to developing my own sound. More than four decades ago, the Kronos Quartet started a conversation about innovative string playing, to which Turtle Island String Quartet quickly joined. Today, both quartets, and others, incorporate new music in myriad genres and improvisation into their models of ensemble playing. This movement has included several jazz-style string quartets, such as Uptown String Quartet (formed by Maxine Roach and her father Max Roach), Soldier String Quartet, Modern String Quartet, Black Swan Quartet, and more currently, New York-based Sirius String Quartet, and Polish group Atom String Quartet, among others.

These examples notwithstanding, there are few chamber jazz ensembles around, and these projects are usually not led by violinists. There are several reasons for this. For one, violinists are trained as soloists and may, self-indulgently, regard chamber or large ensemble works as of secondary value. In any case, I was the only improvising string player in my year anyway, so I had few opportunities to collaborate with string players interested in jazz. For another, composition and arrangement are not necessarily drilled into the skillset of a (classically-trained) violinist, much less this one. While jazz has a strong tradition of musicians writing their own pieces, classically trained musicians are less accustomed to such a role. Throughout my studies and in expanding my projects, I have written material to play, though not often on a large scale that involves complex orchestration or arrangement.

Thus, my reluctance in working with a larger ensemble. Finally, and somewhat speculatively, string quartets or the like may not be considered suitable jazz ensembles to be assessed at an institutional level because of the lack of a rhythm section.

In order to prove myself, it seemed necessary to succeed in a more conventional format first. My experience playing Dave Holland's music therefore offered a more suitable model of what I could and should do. Although not written for violin, his compositions were carefully selected and arranged to allow me to play in a regular jazz ensemble. I follow what Grappelli says about improvisation: 'In jazz, you do your improvisation, but you do what you can do. In classical music, you must do what you can't do' (1981:24). I find this reflects a profound understanding and honest assessment of musical possibilities and limitations. If Grappelli were talking about doing what one 'can do' in jazz, I think of this not only in terms of technical ability, but also as what suits the instrument, and the circumstances of the performance.

## 2.3 First Interlude: JP-Pei Duo

How jazz ensembles interact musically depends to a great extent on their size. The larger the group, the more rigid a musical form may be needed to contain over-proliferation of ideas. This section, conversely, offers a perspective on my approach to the smallest ensemble. While the JP-Pei Duo has been vital in the recent development of my creative practice, I prefer to use it throughout this dissertation to address other aspects of my research – in this case, ensemble interaction. I spent most of 2017-2018 working with a classically trained pianist, JP Muir, who is a gigging jazz musician and Senior Programme Manager of the Bloomsbury Festival. He leads several jam sessions, and until recently organized a jazz series at The Hampstead Jazz Club. JP also runs the Sunday night jazz

sessions at my College – an opportunity as relevant as any to my fieldwork.[12] I initiated our work together, intrigued by playing with someone who has a similar background to mine – prior classical training and now deeply involved in jazz. JP has a great tone on the piano and a rich harmonic palette, no doubt from his experience of playing advanced piano works. My previous small-ensemble experience had been primarily with my group TriYeoh (no prizes for guessing its size), exploring groove-based music with intricate patterns and riffs, complex rhythmic interplay, and textural layering. However, ballads with lush harmonies are harder for TriYeoh to execute with violin, bass and drums, because of the lack of a chordal instrument. Hence, my work with JP offers an opportunity for a different sound and approach, inspiring me to write new material.

JP and I decided early on that I would lead this project. Even so, ensembles are inherently collaborative, requiring discussion to resolve any musical issues that arise. We understood the challenges of playing as a duo – and wanted to overcome them, not just to endure them. Furthermore, I disliked feeling like a typical front-liner, who would play the flashy, soloistic parts, then leave my 'accompanist' to his/her own devices. I wanted the ensemble to be more than the sum of its parts, and to address the logistical challenges of truly playing *as* a duo. In an ensemble, instrumental roles are typically divided according to the musical capacities of the instruments, i.e. the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic layers of the whole.[13] When two musicians have to cover all the bases between them, some compromises have to be made – without losing any component completely. In the JP-Pei Duo, I began to explore what aside from solos I could contribute: comping on the violin,

[12] John-Paul Muir is a Master's graduate of Guildhall School of Music and Dance in solo piano performance.

[13] Hans Koller profoundly taught me to think of a jazz ensemble as like a football team (goalkeeper = drummer, defender = bassist, midfielder = pianist / guitarist, striker = frontline instruments or singer). His point was about time-keeping being the responsibility of everyone in the ensemble, just as goal-keeping is the responsibility of all the team, not just the goalkeeper.

playing counter-melodies to the piano's lines, and using the full textural range of the violin (tremolo, harmonics, pizzicato, etc.). Gradually, with unspoken understanding, JP began to respond to my little musical injections and to shape his playing accordingly. When it came to my solos, he played a supportive role – but there was also flexibility between our roles, improvisations crossing over one to the other, and the violin always at least present on the side-lines. It was not just a collaborative sound, but a 'sound of involvement', in which we each were engaged in upholding the collective of two.

It is difficult to describe our collective sound without contradicting myself. JP still mostly retains his role as a comping instrument and I retain mine as the lead. Yet in combination we work around those roles to produce a sound that seems more than a duo: me, with my misplaced violin; JP, with his resilient classical technique; both of us engrossed in jazz. At the beginning, we played standards together, coming to understand the skills of each other through improvisation. Later, we played our own compositions, accommodated to this new sound and eager to hear how it would sound in this context. Next, we tested the boundaries of our musical understanding of each other having gone through the previous processes. This does not involve selecting specific pieces or engineering conditions to accommodate our perceived ensemble limitations, but it is to play together, and crucially, to perform together. In some ways, this is the sternest test of all, because our previous work was sympathetic to each other's sound and skills. Now, I felt that we have transcended 'us' and are focussed on music-making. Theoretically, there may not be any distinction between sounding good together and being an ensemble, but in practice, there is a fundamental shift in focus. I consider it like the difference between a date and a relationship – where the former is about novelty, defining each other for each other; and the latter means defining each other to others.

As two accomplished musicians, it was not difficult for us to play together despite how I have detailed our creative process through the perceived difficulties of ensemble work. Yet, natural musical challenges still arise and one of it was playing contemporary, post-bop pieces without a rhythm section. While I believe it would be possible to develop that aspect of our ensemble, it is beyond my present capabilities. Furthermore, I have no natural inclination towards bebop on the violin. It symbolizes, for me, the jazz violin myth in my practice. I generally avoid bebop tunes, which in turn, further isolates me in a practice in which I already feel isolated. The importance of being able to play in a bebop style represents to me, in some ways, a way of belonging in the jazz tradition. My discomfort in playing bebop is to me a musical and social handicap to my jazz identity.

In confronting my 'bebophobia', I sought to apply Grappelli's 'can do' approach in my practice. Whether the result qualifies as bebop or not is beside the point. JP and I did what we could – that is what matters. Playing bebop thus became a matter of relative, rather than absolute, ability. 'Donna Lee' (Portfolio: Audio 1) is an example in which we experimented with collaborative interplay in order to overcome some of the challenges of bebop. It is a tune that we chose for one of our public performance (13th July 2017), which also included some of our originals. In this case, we were not only trying to play bebop as a duo, but we were also playing bebop alongside our other repertoire. In other words, it was not just our success in playing the tune that was at stake, but it is also whether we could integrate it cohesively into our programme, while retaining our collective style.

When Amiri Baraka wrote in *Blues People* that bebop had 'more than an accidental implication of social upheaval associated with it' (1963:188), he was referring to a spirit of self-determination that constructed new possibilities of an African American musicality. Without wishing to overstate the case, given our very different political contexts, I embrace

Baraka's description in my self-determined, newly constructed practice of bebop. As argued above, it is consistent with Grappelli's 'can do' approach as well. 'Donna Lee' is one of JP-Pei's most open pieces, in which we deconstruct the piece, improvising with the theme and with each other's responses to it. We dispense with fixed time and instead allow time to sneak in and out between musical gestures, as we please. The result is a slightly humorous and unpredictable version of 'Donna Lee' that is wholly ours in nature and style. Our initial tentativeness gives way to something richer, I think, than would result if we played the piece in a straight-ahead manner. However, my concern now in moving forward is that it may remain my only way to approach playing bebop pieces. A free approach to improvisation helps to resolve some musical difficulties, but it is not necessarily sustainable as a means of developing one's skills – that is, it will not help me to play bebop in anything like a conventional way. Nevertheless, it offers a degree of self-determination in a bebop-centric context. This and other benefits of free improvisation are discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter 3 - Improvisation And Then Some

## 3.1 Free Improvisation

Taking Grappelli's 'can do' approach further, I look to free improvisation as my other mode of performance. My exposure to this practice began at almost the same time as I started learning jazz, but I received it via learning contemporary classical music (which George Lewis calls a Eurological form). Music of John Cage, Morton Feldman, Terry Riley, Frederic Rzewski, Christian Wolff, La Monte Young and many other composers featured in my three years with the New Music Ensemble as an undergraduate. Improvisation in that context is not 'free' per se, but the music requires an approach that would eventually shape my exploration of the practice as a whole.

Playing contemporary classical works widened my understanding of what improvisation could be and introduced me to extended instrumental techniques that I had not previously considered using. To my surprise, there was no audition for the New Music Ensemble and students of any instrument could participate. Yet the ensemble was often overlooked, its members invited by the director or, like me, sent an enquiring email. Even though ensemble participation was compulsory at college, there was no specific requirement or limit on the number of groups one joined; students could be as adventurous or passive as they wished. Nevertheless, their choices typically reflected their genre specialisations, generating unmarked boundaries between ensembles. Perhaps deliberately, there was no indication that the New Music Ensemble would involve improvisation; it sat uncomfortably between established tracks of classical or jazz performance. Indeed, the specific skillset of contemporary classical music often goes under-recognised. The ambiguity of the practice – requiring both scrupulous attention to aspects of the notation and

flexibility in interpreting the score creatively – can make it unappealing to both factions of students. Fortunately for me, it was precisely this synthesis that I wanted to cultivate in my practice.

The New Music Ensemble's repertoire was diverse, depending to an extent on our instrumentation, but we never felt obliged to play a specific type of contemporary music to fit in. Indeed, it sometimes explored concepts that radically challenge the notion of 'art' in music. Reflecting on my rudimentary understanding of musical creativity at that time, I realise that this exposure to new music and its performance practice gave me new perspectives that became invaluable to how I approach improvisation (both free and idiomatic forms). Aspects of new music helped to shape my practice as a synthesis of classical and jazz styles, in praxes. Among these was the use of extended instrumental techniques to create new sounds and effects, in response to symbols used by the composer. This was an exercise in discovering the limits of my instrument and, more importantly, challenging my imagination as to what sounds may be possible and how to achieve them. Another aspect was the highly complex notation, which requires a technical precision sometimes bordering on impossibility to execute; or the deceptively simple scores of so-called Minimalist music, which demand stamina and absolute consistency in performance. In almost all cases, the music reveals a need for classical training among those who seek to read and perform it.

The other side of New Music, which relies on the instinct of improvisation, is found in the dichotomy between choice and chance. Whether in 'aleatoric' music (Boulez) or 'indeterminate' music (Cage), the composer relinquishes some compositional control by removing the ability to choose. Cage saw this as a way to compose truly free music, to create music that is 'free of individual taste and memory, (…) and traditions of the art'

(1961:59) – which, for him, made improvisation itself a depository of habit that required chance to constrain. Moving forward, some form of improvisational practice may be required to realise Earle Brown's graphic scores; control is a playful illusion shared among composer, performer, and notation. I recall working through these complex conceptions in rehearsals as filled with great uncertainty. While the composers' notes for performers often allow for fairly free approaches to the notation, they may also describe in great amount the effects that should result. As a classically trained musician myself, fidelity to the score remains my default mode, in the (misplaced) belief that this will draw out the exacting expression of the composer.

Gradually, I learnt to take ownership of my creative decisions in interpreting the score. I was encouraged to form opinions about my technical approach, especially when some pieces were not written for specific instrumentation but for specific sound textures – and this resonated with my jazz experience. None of the music in jazz are written for a specific instrument and the performance is based on the interpretation of the musicians. My experience with the New Music Ensemble taught me to think more about musical intentions when the complexity of notation stands in the way of understanding the piece – and to an extent, of executing the piece. That is, the intentionality of the improvisation is just as important as the intentionality behind the notation, even as the improvisation is conceived from within the notation. This fed into my mentality when approaching jazz improvisation at the beginning. When finding the right notes can overwhelm me, I have come to recognize that the spirit (intentionality) of improvisation is just as powerful and effective. A case in point: even if the playing of Stuff Smith would be considered less fluid and polished than Jean-Luc Ponty's, both performances capture what jazz improvisation is in their intentionality of the improvisation.

As my experiences of improvisation in a contemporary classical context assisted and developed my jazz understanding, I began to explore other forms of jazz improvisation – not just the ones that I learnt from jazz school which was mostly idiomatic improvisation. My participation in stereotypical jazz contexts had been creatively limiting for a violinist even as I was battling other technical conundrums regarding the jazz violin myth. My early, naïve experiences of jazz improvisation as 'without wrong notes' or 'anything goes' (despite it being an incorrect perception), led me towards exploring the position of improvising freely and how it can mean different things in different improvisational contexts. In any case, there seemed to be more improvising violinists in the free improvisation form than in the jazz context. My understanding of improvising freely sat somewhere between free improvisation and free jazz. My parallel experience of improvisation in both jazz (Afrological) and contemporary classical (Eurological) contexts resonates with Derek Bailey's division, in his survey of musicians from different backgrounds and traditions (1992), between idiomatic and non-idiomatic modes of improvisation. Derek Bailey confirms that a confusion persists between free improvisation and free jazz; and as such the music tends to be defined by other descriptors such as jazz, experimental, avant-garde, and others (2004:263). While categorising improvisational idioms has its semantic issues, it is necessary to define improvisation firstly as a 'freestanding musical activity' (Rose & MacDonald, 2014:269). This, with the emphasis on 'musical', is how I would like to define and develop my improvisational practice.

In practice, I saw both free jazz and free improvisation as similar except for one difference – the use of a drum kit in free jazz where free improvisation tends to use a deconstructed version with multiple percussion instruments. A drum groove is quite pervasive in most presentations of free jazz, while the contributions of other instruments

may be sparser and more varied. This is not a concrete difference between free jazz and free improvisation, but a general observation: that a rhythmic groove is the most resilient of jazz conventions. Indeed, Keith Jarrett's famed *Köln Concert* (1975), on solo piano, is almost hypnotically rhythmic, building a groove through riffs and motifs. Other albums such as John Coltrane's *Ascension* (1965) and Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity* (1964) provide good examples of how free jazz operates from a groove platform. Indeed, Ornette Coleman's revolutionary album *Free Jazz* (1961) features a double quartet, each with its own rhythm section. The primary improvisation operating within a quartet is pitched against the other quartet as a secondary layer, which makes the whole performance very rich in form and material. What the double quartet offers *Free Jazz* is a highly idiomatic style of improvisation because drums give structure to the collective sound in the form of a groove.

By contrast, free improvisation (which rarely uses drums per se but an array of percussion instruments) tends to focus more on the texture of sounds and less on a rhythmic impulse, such as provided by a drum kit. It is too simplistic to make such a broad distinction, however, as the instrumentation does not dictate as an improvisational style, merely suggests a certain proclivity. As Derek Bailey puts it, 'the characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it' (2004:256). Indeed, Jason Robinson argues that the distinction between free improvisation and groove-based improvisation 'betrays the breadth and depth of African-American expressive tradition while potentially relegating open forms of improvisation to a state without history or culture' (2016:101). Personally, I cannot say that I improvise differently in a free jazz context to a free improvisation context (whatever the disparity), but I do find creative differences among the musicians and the instruments that I interact with in the two contexts.

There is no denying that improvisational styles are influenced by instrumental roles, which are in turn determined by their function within an ensemble – whether as principally rhythmic, harmonic, or melodic. The drum kit struggles to play melodic lines (for obvious reasons), in a way that it does not trouble pitched instruments to produce rhythmic interest or even percussive sounds. For example, I occasionally tap the body of my violin with either my bow or my hand. All wooden instruments have a percussive resonance. Wind players can click on the pads or valves of their instruments, which (if one listens closely) can be differentiated in pitch. But none of these is built for the heavier physical impact usually required on percussion instruments to generate any significant volume. Still, if other instruments can use unconventional techniques to produce percussive tones, the drums too can explore a range of sound that takes them far beyond a purely rhythmic function.

## 3.2 Free Language

But here I struggle between thinking of free improvisation as a sound-based experiment and as a musical expression. Are we making unconventional sounds for the sake of making sounds? Can free improvisation be tonal, familiar, engaging; or does it need to be atonal, strange, and baffling? Many free improvisation sessions I have participated in tread this line clumsily: A tentative start, as if to test the silence, then a cacophony of voices fighting to out-sound each other (those poor violins sawing away unheard). Once the loudest instruments have cleared out a bit, the less demonstrative ones may have a go (depending on who is brazen enough to keep up the ear battering). Quite suddenly, the sputtering ends; musicians and audience eye one another nervously, neither wanting to commit to the fact that this is the end (music's greatest faux-pas: to clap too soon). Over time, I came to the slow realisation that free improvisation still requires an 'improvising language' or an 'improvising form' – the very elements that I imagined myself escaping – in order to convey

meaning. Bailey describes his own practice as finding a way of 'dealing with a freely improvised situation in which a conventional vocabulary proved inadequate' (2004:260).

Bailey describes how his improvising language grew out his varied interests in serial, atonal, free, and early electronic musics. By own his admission, his idiom acquires some homogeneity (I read this as consistency) as it develops, until he introduces new material. Constant addition is necessary for the music to be fresh – even though it is making 'change for the sake of change' (p.261). Bailey's reflection is in part about solo improvising, in which an established vocabulary is crucial as there is no 'pool of language' to work with, contributed by other ensemble members. I have experienced group improvisations in which the 'pool of language' felt restrictive – though whether I needed to respond to it at all is another matter altogether. But on other occasions, the common pool has given me the impetus for something new, to break open the texture. Conversely, I have performed solo improvisations, in both jazz and free improvisation, in which I felt constrained by the singularity of my voice. Although the violin offers a lot of sonic variety, I can feel limited by my language; having constantly to create the moments for myself risks repetitiveness. The improvisation may flounder too long on a narrative or theme, making it one-dimensional; or it may swing the other way, becoming too complex and disjointed with various ideas. This example in the Mopomoso workshop is one in which I felt I was grasping desperately at sounds (Portfolio: Audio 2). The result is a curious blend between my desire for complete freedom, to be unconcerned about the consequences of each sound, and my attempt to find meaning in and connection between the sounds that I made.

This is where a form or concept comes in useful. It helps to provide a focus to the improvisation and to give it meaningful shape. If free improvisation is difficult to get hold of, it is even harder to keep hold of (Bailey, 2004:263). A conceptual idea or form may not be

apparent to listeners, but it may provide clarity, even creative interest, for the musicians. This I found true of my experience as a guest soloist at a Mopomoso workshop on 16th April 2018 (Portfolio: Audio 3a, 3b, 3c). After I played a short improvised solo piece, the group divided themselves into mini-ensembles, as per their routine with guest soloists, with me as the constant in each group. Just as I struggled to engage with my solo improvisation, I now swung to the other extreme, interested to engage in group improvisation. I felt new interactions emerge with each group and the musical ideas presented required different ranges of my technical abilities to express that distinction. The mini-ensemble form gave me a creative focus to develop upon. It is difficult to articulate in more detail exactly what was musically interesting or why – identifying instruments and personalities seems too obvious a point. Deborah Wong suggests that while improvisations accede to some arrangements, 'creative tensions arising from differences are just as important' (2004:284). While I had played with a few of these musicians in past, I had not met most of those present. Furthermore, being guest soloist for the night raised tricky musical questions. Should I take the lead or allow others to 'speak' first? Was I to be the reason or the excuse for them to improvise? These considerations floated through my mind as I improvised with each mini-ensemble. This also feeds into my experience when establishing and managing my own ensembles.

I find a greater sense of engagement with an improvisation that has some sign posts than one that it is free-form. This is not to say that free-form improvisations are creatively weak, but I believe that the material typically translates better to the audience when it is conceptually motivated. Perhaps no improvisation wholly captures its listeners from beginning to end (and it is hard to know how actively audiences are engaging with one's sound anyway). Furthermore, a concept may lead to more inspired moments of collective

improvisation, such as I once experienced playing with the London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO). The LIO employs 'conduction' (conducted improvisation) as a method of conveying signals to musicians; these include pitch, rhythm, and time cues, or any combination of them. Once, after an improvised piece in which a guest conductor led us, the orchestra spontaneously resumed improvised following the applause. There was no hesitancy in the entrance (in the way that so many improvisations struggle to find a 'beginning'). So compelling was his conduction, and our improvisation upon it, that we felt the desire to continue even after the piece had 'ended'. The inspiration was palpable; within the first few notes, the orchestra rushed forward to greet each other, as if to continue the previous conduction, but now freely improvising (Portfolio: Audio 4, Audio 5). This was free improvisation in its truest guise: it was certain, it was cohesive, and it was meaningful. The experience is still with me, one of the most genuine moments of my time with the LIO; it shows how a well-led concept can inspire creative work, generated in response to it.

Conceptual frameworks do not guarantee successful free improvisations, however. An improvisation can be misunderstood, sitting incoherently between its conceptual purpose and its musical outcome. One such experience came for me in a performance I witnessed of *Umbrella Resistance* (2015), featuring an improvising flautist with a yellow umbrella, which was inspired by the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (September – December 2014).[14] The piece purposed to explore the relationship between the musician and a graphic score printed on a yellow umbrella, with an improvisation on the theme of resistance. In a presentation, the performer explained how he would incorporate 'resistance' – against the instrument's range, against the musician's abilities, against

[14] It was performed at 'Doctors in Performance' 2nd Festival Conference of Music Performance and Artistic Research (8-9th September 2016), Royal Irish Academy of Music.

another performer who 'handles' the score, and against the score itself – in his improvisation. What came to me at the end of the performance, however, was sheer incredulity at having spent my morning in a room with other young academics, watching a flautist improvising with/to/at a yellow squiggly umbrella from different positions in a room. Unaccustomed to reacting so cynically (my own act of resistance, in this case), I struggled through the many questions vying for attention: Was my discontent with the improvising language, with the form, or with the umbrella – or indeed with myself? Why should this – or any – audience care how this performance articulates resistance, in the face of the genuine threats to democracy in Hong Kong and around the world? And behind all these questions, an inner struggle: why listen (to me) at all?

## 3.3 Can Do, So What?

Improvisation is not the most palatable of music and, unlike other forms of avant-garde art, needs to be experienced as a whole, live. To be meaningful, music has somehow to resonate on a more tangible level than the sound it makes. But what is tangible in music, especially when free improvisation lacks the crutch of text or form? Once, at a department research day (19th May 2017), I joined peers in giving brief presentations of our topics in terms of their 'Objects'. Since my research is practice-based, specifically my own practice, I found this brief tricky. But I took it literally and, as my 'object', played a violin improvisation. Unlike other presenters, who discussed historical documents or artefacts, the object I brought seemed fairly intangible – though it was truly in the room with us, not represented by a shaky photograph. Problematically, I was asking the audience to focus on an object that was heard and not seen. But along with it, I confronted the audience with me playing – Asian, female, violin – which is a few objects in one. One dilemma I was faced was whether or not to explain my object, with either option having the potential to undermine my presentation,

on the creative basis of improvisation. Say too much and the improvisation would be meaningless; say too little and the research aim could be lost. Furthermore, in an academic setting, with a cross-section of music researchers and/or music practitioners present, how would they respond, as intellectuals and/or listeners? Predictably, the reactions I received ranged from hostile incomprehension to genuine interest at being presented with a creative act. An improvisation may struggle to appeal to a musician, it seems, for its lack of defined practice, and similarly struggle to appeal to a researcher for its lack of textuality – 'object-ness', as it were. If this was an indictment of my research methodology, it is the most relevant one by far.

Validity, it seems, is harder to achieve through improvisation than with notated music because of an increased ambiguity of musical meaning. These doubts are not limited to free improvisation but extend also to jazz. I find myself increasingly impatient with the endless soloing at jam sessions, or the standard head-solo-head form – which fulfils expectations more than it enhances creative practice. Similarly, improvisation can offer more pretention than substance in performance, or even (as I am confronted by constantly) in research. A similar sentiment is expressed by bassist Gavin Bryars, who fears that musicians are able to 'sham' listeners in freely improvised performances (Bailey, 1992:113). He challenges the ideology of free improvisation as creatively limited and non-transcendent: as a musician, one only gets out what one puts in, never pushing forward. I see his point. Because improvisation is never free of a musician's personal sound and practice, it is unable to transcend the situation in which those are produced. What could be more contrived than playing the instrument in which one is highly trained? Each improvisation that I play is, theoretically, the same as any other; it is hard to justify this as a creative practice. Do I collude in the 'sham' that Bryars points out?

Improvising freely is no guarantee of creativity and Gavin Bryars is of the opinion that only composition is able to achieve creative transcendence (Bailey, 1992: 113-7). The synonymy of improvisation to the musician limits creative conceptions in that it will only ever encompass all the creative effort of a particular time, place, and musician. The music can never transcend those limitations through improvisation. While improvisation can be seen as a kind of conceptual excellence in itself, a composition, however, can offer a platform for conceptions that stand apart from the musician while exploring creative boundaries impossible in a free improvisation (which, theoretically at least, is an act of impulse, not deliberation). The music is transcendent inasmuch as it exists apart from the musician and the moment, allowing it a kind of freedom. But making music 'free' of musicians is quite a different matter to musicians making music freely (as in free improvisation). Even so, one could suppose that there can be no music, free or otherwise, without a musician (technological interventions excepted), and there we stand at an existential conundrum.

Yet, is it possible for an ensemble of strangers to play together with creative transcendence, and not descend into a 'sham'? I believe my experience performing in an improvisation festival in Warsaw (Portfolio: Link 3) as part of the Veryan Weston Trio represents that to a degree. While I had played with Weston once before, in an informal setting, I had not met percussionist Bei Bei Wang (who would make up the trio). Weston contacted me after an LIO session to invite me to join him. The story goes that he found my duet with the flute player in the orchestra so compelling that he wanted us to work together (Portfolio: Audio 6). While that was a welcome compliment, it made me realize that I am only as good as I am heard – and the opportunity to be heard remains the greatest hurdle for a musician, especially in the context of such a large ensemble. Our performance

as a trio was built purely on circumstance. We arrived in Warsaw and hurried to a local music institution to select some percussion for Wang. Later at the sound check, we played just enough to get our levels on stage, no more. Since we had never performed together before (not that the organisers knew this, mind), and had only just procured Wang's instruments, what point was there in rehearsing? When the time came, I felt keen to perform, as freely as our contrived settings would allow us. The performance was nothing short of exhilarating. It was as Rose and Macdonald (2014:269) describe improvisation to be, 'freestanding musical activity'; without relying too much on extended techniques, extreme instrumental presentations, or 'noise' to sensationalize the performance – as sometimes occur in free improvisation contexts (Portfolio: Video 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d).

Did we use familiar musical textures and techniques on our instruments? Yes, to the best of my knowledge. Did we manage to transcend what we brought to the improvisation – that is, to disassociate ourselves from the music sufficiently to aspire (in Bryars's terms) to 'true creativity'? Yes, we were as disengaged as one could be before the performance, yet as alert as one could be during it. The lack of rehearsal ensured that the experience came fresh, to the point that the violin initially felt unfamiliar to my hands. We did not discuss any details of our performance – if we are doing 'pieces' or a whole piece, solos or duos – except to be mindful of the performance's duration (an hour, with no interval). Among ourselves, there was genuine anticipation for how we would play together – with and for each other. Rarely have I felt such certainty about a performance, even if it was free improvisation and we could surely sham the audience with no backlash. For us, it was a performance that transcended who we were, transcended the sum of us, and transcended the act of creativity – it was music, beyond our powers to determine exactly how it was so. This is the crux of it:

we knew that we could be creative individually, but what we could not prepare for or guarantee is being musical *collectively*.

Slowly, I am beginning to understand Bryars's condemnation of free improvisation and his vehement insistence on composition as a means of creative transcendence. It is in part a reflection of his disappointment with the physical limitations of creative practice and, I believe, his misconception of what it means to be creative. My disagreement with Bryars is the cold intellectualism of his view of musical creativity. He considers the self as a barrier to creative transcendence, but conceives of composition as the appropriate vehicle for it – which merely transfers the value of creativity from musician to text. This apparent removal of musicians' interventions makes music a product rather than a process. Indeed, in Bryars' words, 'I'm more interested in conception than reality' (p.115). So much so that in pursuing creativity one may lose track of musicality. In my experience, when a performance is musical, it is almost always perceived as creative; yet the reverse is not the case, as evidenced by how Bryars' perception of free improvisation as a 'sham' and, to an extent, my experience of *Umbrella Resistance* (2015). In other words, conceptual creativity does not necessarily translate into musical viability and, in fact, may undermine our search for fleeting glimpses of creativity rather than fulfilling it. Perhaps what we should prioritize in the practice of music is less creativity than musicality.

It is not my intention to exchange one terminology for another, but the layers of my understanding peel back gradually with every page. While I started with creativity at the centre of my investigation, I now find myself looking deeper into my practice, searching to understand what it is that I do, and how and why I do it. While I am not dismissing creativity, I am trying to approach it with more subtlety. Creativity is often associated with improvisation or composition (Deliège & Wiggins, 2006; Lehmann, Sloboda & Woody,

2007a), which may misplace musicality as an attribute of their performance context. I think of how Bryars in his search for creative transcendence, abandoned the relevance of musicality in his discussion. Just as creativity is difficult to conceptualize, musicality is an attribute that is often associated with 'spirit, meaning, or other nebulous terms' (Smart & Green, 2017:113). Though somewhat ambiguous, it directs us to consider musicality as part of a holistic process rather than an innate quality that is either present or absent. Thus, I think of the artistic process as fulfilling a creatively engaging and musically satisfying impulse, something I try to accomplish in my practice.

Derek Bailey suggests that good improvisers are focussed 'more on means than ends' (1992:142), and that improvisation is a 'response to music-making imperatives' (p.141). I try to evolve this idea in my creative process (also mindful of my research imperatives), and this is inherently difficult to demonstrate because I can only present 'an end'. Furthermore, 'music-making imperatives' change with time and are influenced by multi-layered motivations. As Bailey writes: 'whether the improvisation can on examination be considered a good piece of music in any terms is not the prime aim of free improvisation' (1980:150) – and 'good piece of music' does not pander to either creativity or musicality. My participation in free improvisation is as a means to explore what musical creativity means at large and to expand my improvisatory language. Yet, in doing so, I am entangled in similar issues of meaning that I would find in any musical or improvisational activity. How do I discern what constitutes as 'creatively engaging and musically satisfying' work?

Perhaps it is not too far to suggest that 'musicianship' may be the element that ties creative practice with the social. Arriving at college, my course mate and I mused that the Musicianship module on our timetable must entail lessons in courtesy and civility, as sportsmanship offered to sport. Of course, it turned out to be an intensive aural boot camp,

to overhaul and upgrade our listening skills. Looking back now, I can't help but wonder if our definition wouldn't have made the module at least as useful. Almost every project that I have worked on over the past two years in this research has been the product of social relationships. I need to consider how those relationships, constructed over time, affect my creative work. To that end, I follow Vijay Iyer's notion in describing the embodiment of improvisation as a non-linear narrative that involves 'shifting, multiple, continually reconstructed subjectivities (…) encoded in a diverse variety of sonic symbols, occurring at different levels and subject to different stylistic controls' (2004:395). In the next chapter, I will consider how the illusion of self tussles with the reality of the group, drawing out what I think of as musicality (and musicianship). Through this, I examine social relationships that result from creative relationships, mindful still, that creativity and friendships that draw musicians together do not necessarily answer to social equity. Rather, I consider self as an illusion, perceived as an invisible and pliable form when working with/against a constructed collective – embodying the dialectical nature of improvisation.

# Chapter 4 - The Jazz Socialite

Some conclusions about my social position in jazz arose through my ensemble, TriYeoh, which in greater part inspired this research project. The trio was formed during my postgraduate studies at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, when I was one of the few female musicians in the Jazz Department. Most of the female jazz students were frontline instrumentalists or singers; there was only one female drummer and one other female violinist. I was also the only visible minority from a non-English speaking country. These qualities are all parts of my identity and may have influenced how I was perceived within, or positioned with respect to, the local jazz community. This was a community that included a few female students but no female tutors. It had previously accepted several jazz violinists, demonstrating some willingness to push traditional boundaries – even if the right teaching methods for jazz violin remained, as always, undecided. Musically, the jazz community was quite robust with a strong emphasis on post-bop music. Beyond this, students were encouraged to explore different forms of jazz and improvisation by composing their own pieces and searching for inspiration outside standard repertoire. Jazz practice is not simply about playing music, however; it is also about playing the music *together* – and social as well as musical identities play a part in forming groups.

## 4.1 Gender

The jazz community as a whole is largely male-dominated. Having been one of the few female students in college, that reality is nothing new to me, but it is not easy to confront. One benefit of a small community is that it behaves like a large, extended family. But this can also be to one's detriment if some form of 'difference' means one does not fall in with the pack. The usual tropes of female musicians having to work harder to be taken seriously,

or to behave in a certain way to be accepted by her community, are real and ever present in conversation today. In December 2017, a day-long symposium entitled 'Making the Changes: A Powerful Symposium for Women in Jazz', presented by Southbank Centre and the UK Women's Jazz Collective, featured roundtable discussions, break-out sessions, and presentations by women in the industry. Statistics demonstrated the gender imbalance in the jazz industry, telling a story that would be unsurprising to many female musicians. Indeed, the problem runs deeper than numbers. One participant noted how this imbalance is perpetuated by an invisible structural privilege, which in turn hides its own cost in lost opportunity: an unconscious bias perpetuated by those in the industry. It would never occur to my male colleagues as out of the ordinary that I am the lone female in the group, or that their first choices for projects are always male (a result, perhaps, of my 'invisibility'). I am not suggesting that all my creative relationships should be reciprocal; but in any jazz community, musicians tend to recur in each other's projects. The question then is: why not me also? Of course, I have the additional burden of being a violinist, but more on that later.

When determining the origin of jazz, Lara Pellegrinelli (2008:31-47) argues that the erasure of female singers from the jazz canon (to which singing has historically been women's primary contribution) has indirectly marginalized the participation of subsequent female instrumentalists. She writes that the 'parentage of jazz' is implicitly coded by instrument and gender where the blues is associated with the female voice, and ragtime represented the technical mastery of male performers on their instruments. Her point is largely based on a critique of jazz history which tries to legitimize jazz as an art tradition by eliminating the historical messiness of its origin. Sherrie Tucker (1999) critiqued how jazz histories have been written has made it difficult to construct historical narratives that include all-women bands. Conveniently, the absence of instrumental music prior to 1900

and erasure of vocal music from jazz history thereafter contributed neatly to the gender coding of jazz's vocal activities (Pellegrinelli, 2008:36). Furthermore, DeVeaux writes that artistic prestige was afforded to jazz when it outgrew its origins and can be thought of as the abstract manipulation of style and technique, measured against the 'absolute' standards of the European tradition (1991:546). Therefore, its association with Western classical tradition, which has an established history of marginalizing women composers and musicians, makes gender equalization in jazz a muted prospect.

It seems to me that the jazz practice has a relatively wide creative berth, even for those not from the African American tradition. Yet, the same creative licence has yet to be extended to female musicians. Clea Simon (2018) observed this to be the case of Marsalis' Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) Orchestra at a recent performance, finding it to be a 'multi-ethnic and multi-generational' ensemble that was exclusively male. One wonders whether women's contributions to the art are actively rejected or they are simply too constrained by the form to be considered different enough to their male counterparts. Perhaps this is what Pellegrinelli is underlining in her investigation of female singers' importance to the history of jazz. If female singers were given due recognition alongside male instrumentalists, differences between blues and ragtime would be less defined by gender, and the co-creation of jazz by men and women would be better recognised, and even, naturalized. Pellegrinelli (2008) presents much evidence portraying the popularity and permeating presence of jazz vocalists in early jazz practice yet comments that literature on jazzwomen mostly feature instrumentalists. According to her, the mainstream success of female singers may complicate or eclipse the overall narrative of female instrumentalists, who lack such recognition (p.31).

Either way Pellegrinelli's observations are now by-the-by and to persist in the gender bias narrative is to be ineffective about the present situation. After all, women have made great strides in getting equal opportunities via education to participate on the same level as men. There are also more workshops and programmes that actively promote women in music. Even so, there are some who disagree with creating a separate place for women to showcase their music, believing that it marginalizes women further if they do not compete on the same field as men. If women are still marginalized in the industry, as the thinking goes, it is through no fault of men, but of women's failure to equal the achievements of men. Studies by Charles Schmidt (2005) and Gina Wych (2012) have found that there is no correlation between gender and instrumental or improvisational ability. However, this only emphasizes the opinion that women are just not good enough based on the limited participation of women in jazz. Furthermore, if we consider that the type and capacity of labour is equal in a jazz performance, gender bias steals in as a condition of social stakes, from non-musical conditions. So, perhaps we are looking for gender bias in the wrong places. Of course, quantitative research studies in music remain inconclusive as they can never replicate the exact nature of musical performance, much less measure the effectiveness of musical learning. The fact that these studies are carried out on participants of various age levels and backgrounds drives home the point that gender bias (however it is practised in jazz) is, ironically, not the result of gender difference.

The gender issue is made all the more opaque by the fact that music-making commonly masks, or renders inconsequential, the physical characteristics of the creator or performer. An opera cast may need a soprano or two, but a big band has no inherent need for a female saxophone player – or male saxophone player, by that same token. Yet, it remains difficult for women to challenge the structural privilege that sees those big band

chairs populated, by and large, by male musicians.[15] Indeed, the issue is invisible to most male musicians. If there is a gender bias, it is one that is unconsciously delivered. Also, most female instrumentalists choose not to consider their gender as relevant to their playing. For sure, there is no differential in performing abilities, but I believe that there may be a difference in the way we approach a performance that stems from how we are afforded space to participate.

This is impossible to measure but it may be felt in performing situations. Improvising cellist Susanne Paul sensibly comments that it is impossible to judge how different (better or worse) her experience could be if she were a male musician (personal interview, March 2018). In other words, she is reserving judgment about her personal (female) experience, preferring instead to rate her musical (cello) experience in terms of her work with 'cooperative, supportive colleagues'. Given her choice of musicians, she does not find herself confronted by the macho culture of jazz. Jazz violinist Meg Okura even finds it a benefit to be one of few female musicians as she gets better treatment such as her own dressing room; she is well-respected by colleagues and finds no gender pay gap (personal interview, March 2018). This contrasts with the experience of jazz cellist Akua Dixon who notes the difficulties that she and other jazz women face in the industry, resulting from a lack of respect for female jazz instrumentalists in the way they are treated (personal interview, March 2018). The general consensus among musicians is that performing jazz (or any music, for that matter) is not dependent on gender attributes. Yet, gender is still performed in these situations (validating Butler's notion of gender as performative), so much so that performing jazz has become associated with performing masculinity (1990).

[15] Wynton Marsalis' prestigious Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JALC) continues to be associated with the issue of gender equity. See: Clea Simon 'Music Commentary: JALC Orchestra – Women Are Locked Out' (9th July 2018)

Therefore, Pellegrinelli is right when she considers that the historical erasure of female singers from jazz historiography equally established the structural privilege afforded to male instrumentalists. Subsequently, unequal access has led to greater insecurity about improvisational ability and a restriction to gender 'appropriate' instruments, as shown in studies by Green (1997), McKeage (2002, 2004), and Wehr-Flowers (2006). Studies by Abeles and Porter (1978), Delzell and Leppla (1992) and Zervoudakes and Tanur (1994) among others, identified some instruments that are gendered from masculine to feminine as: drums, trombone, trumpet, saxophone, cello, clarinet, violin, and flute – furthering Tucker's (2002) claim that women do not play instruments common to jazz. Even so, studies have shown that females are more likely to cross the gender boundaries than males Abeles, 2009, Conway, 2000). Yet, the lack of female participation leading to the lack of female role models has been identified as one of the reasons women are underrepresented in jazz (Cartwright, 2001). Furthermore, these very characteristics may then be seen to constitute femininity in jazz, falsely conceptualizing a gendered practice of jazz.

One way to potentially overcome these restrictions is to celebrate difference in a pronounced way – by creating all-female ensembles, having separate categories for women's music-making, awarding grants for female-led projects, and other similar methods. While creating opportunities, however, these devices send out a gendered message about jazz practice. They indirectly position music-making as secondary to gender identity and creates doubt as to an individual's creative ability. This perspective was thrown into sharp relief for me when I participated in WOW – the Women of the World Orchestra (Portfolio: Figure 2). The WOW Festival was established in 2010 to discuss issues of gender equality. Its all-female orchestra plays compositions by female composers only, under the baton of a female conductor. While the project seems like a great platform for women to present their

creative work, the overall tone of the performance I played in felt like an invective-strewn free-for-all against men. Combining comedy and music, its message was anti-male as much as it was feminist.

I chose to participate in the WOW Orchestra because it aligned with my research to engage in activities for female musicians. However, the performance made me feel uncomfortable about how women are confronting the world (men, really) about gender equality. A week-long, women-only festival is certainly not comparable to the centuries of male-dominated performance to which it stands as a small corrective. But the tone of activism should not be directed towards 'punishing' men for long-constructed social norms, which inevitably will take time to replace. What equalizing opportunity does to promote women concurrently serves to devalue women. That is, we seek out a kind of performative uniformity that further essentializes a gendered practice in jazz, one that is implicitly coded as male. Moreover, in the rush to ensure gender equality, we risk assuming the 'sameness' of all musicians as our goal, instead of assigning equal value to our differences. It is not that a 'masculine' style is wrong for a female musician to adopt, or that only a 'feminine' style is to be expected from a female musician – as long as we admit that the gendering of music is itself a social construction. It seems that the boundary between performing jazz and performing identity is not so easily delineated.

## 4.2 Intersection

I am cautious of taking the matter of gender bias too far, as my experience is shaped not just by my current environment, but also by years of experience in different contexts. My present social setting and circumstances differ from those of my adolescent years, though the latter no doubt continue to shape my decisions in important ways. Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to separate the past from the present, and to discern the rationale behind every

decision I have made. It also challenging, perhaps impossible, to reflect on and write about my creative practice without drastically altering my practice in the process. But I cannot delve too far into other women's experiences without first addressing a crucial matter, instrument choice.

Since the violin occupies a unique position in jazz, as I have explored in earlier chapters, all my experiences must be through the lens of my instrument. Meg Okura validates this point. She is unable to offer much opinion on gender discrimination in jazz, because there are in any case few side(wo)man gigs on the violin – hence most gigs she does are her own (personal interview, March 2018). It is difficult for her to determine if her lack of opportunities are because of her instrument or her gender identity. However, all her experiences as a side musician has been positive. In college, I considered myself fortunate to be working with great players, and this pattern has continued since. That musicians accept my invitation to play together bodes well for my development. But inviting and being invited are different scenarios. Why is it that musicians rarely initiate opportunities to work with me? Is it because I am a violinist, or a Malaysian female, or because I am no good? More often than not, I have to make something work out for myself. Everyone is hustling to some degree, of course, but part of being a musician is being invited onto others' projects, performing for (and with) colleagues. It is a sign of success that one has a diverse range of experience as a musician and a large network of contacts. How often has it been said that: 'It's not what you know, it's who you know'?

While I understand the need to prove oneself in jazz, especially on an uncommon instrument, I have also played in enough ensembles to know the back roads into jobs. It is as much (and sometimes less) about your abilities as it is about having a good personal network. I recently performed at a venue where the booking manager had neither met me

nor heard me play (Portfolio: Figure 3). My drummer had arranged the gig, which paid a door-share as the band fee. Although we did not have a strong portfolio of the ensemble to send through, the manager said, 'Jim's word is good enough for me'. For the manager to put his faith in word-of-mouth speaks to the strength of social ties in the jazz community as much as the dependability of such recommendations. Meg Okura thinks talent shines through, though. Her example is that she has never heard a good female bass player complaining that she does not get gigs. Good musicians will always be hired, she explains, logically. The unfortunate reality for us violinists is that there are fewer projects requiring us – and 'nobody should be blamed for not hiring jazz violinists' (personal interview, March 2018). I agree with Okura's assessment that violinists must make their own opportunities; but I also wonder why, in a city as diverse as London, I struggle to find gigging female jazz violinists. Most of those I have met or know of are male: Benet McLean, Matt Holborn, Dan Oates, John Garner, Richard Jones, and some longer-established figures such as Chris Garrick and Omar Puente. Is it a case of self-selection instead of gender discrimination? How can it be when most student jazz violinists I have met are female?[16]

There is greater complexity to the issue of discrimination in jazz than can be accounted for in numbers alone. The notion of intersectionality builds on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, in which identity categories are mutually constituted, and constructed through repetitive performance (1990). For example, Meg Okura's experience and my own are not necessarily parallel but they do not discount one another. Our perceptions of overcoming discrimination and a lack of opportunities hinge on the

[16] Non-jazz specific numbers: 50% of Australian music students are female but only 20% of registered professionals are (Australia Council, 2009). Jazz violin numbers: There is a general lack of information on jazz violinists but at the 2017 Seifert Jazz Violin workshop, we were a group of 18 musicians and only 3 were male. As for the case on self-selection, a staff member at the Royal Academy of Music bemoaned the fact that few or no girls apply to the jazz course, perpetuating the gender stereotype for jazz.

intersection of social experience and musical act. This strongly invites me to consider that discrimination is relative to each other's experiences. Still, the argument may be made that gender is inconsequential to the music-making process, whereas instrumentation has a direct effect on music-making – thus making the comparison void. Hence, intersectionality has to be the cornerstone of my discussion because of the 'limitations of gender as a single analytical category' (McCall, 2005:1771).

Gender bias is a difficult subject to broach in casual conversation. Important as it is to my research topic, I find it especially difficult to have meaningful debate about it with other musicians. In conversation, I do not want to lead performers towards a particular response, or to ruin a working relationship with a controversial topic. At the same time, I must not presume to understand my male colleagues' interactions with me without asking their views about female musicians. Their life experiences have not required them to be aware of a gender problem in jazz, or the extent to which female musicians might feel marginalized. Starting a conversation about this can make male musicians sceptical and defensive, particularly if arises from a creative relationship of which I am part of (thus seeming to doubt their good faith) (Portfolio: Figure 1,3,4). Historically, some women's participation in jazz has been facilitated by their male partners – Lil Hardin Armstrong, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Alice Coltrane, Carla Bley, to name a few. Furthermore, countless other jazz women, such as Maria Schneider and Hiromi, were mentored by established male musicians. I realize this will be the default scenario until there are more women in the industry and in educational institutions. In other words, the problem is not that jazz is a male-dominated form. It is if I, as a jazz musician, have nothing characteristic and inventive to offer jazz, it is unlikely that I will get the necessary support from other colleagues to advance, male or female.

Thus, the female experience in jazz may be as varied as it is in other genres too. I have read countless articles and reports about harassment of women musicians in the workplace, but I have also read success stories of women promoted selflessly by men. Moreover, it is not a given that female-only groups are the answer to gender discrimination. According to Julie Dawn Smith, female-only groups more often than not 'polarize the sexual politics already embedded in improvisation' and 'stigmatize women improvisers even further'. She goes on to say how prioritization of gender issues can be both productive and exclusionary. The personal narratives of women that unavoidably focus on the micropolitics of identity too often retreat from the macropolitics of gender and race (2004:232-234). This is clear from my own writing, in which I can only address my personal position; going too deep into the micropolitics of my experience would only serve to make a victim of me, not to force any change. The unevenness of personal experiences makes it difficult to identify a cohesive way to addresses gender bias in jazz. Ultimately, our creative work is the only aspect that we can control to influence attitudes. Tomoko Omura finds it unhelpful to brood on the sexism in jazz, and instead focuses on what she can offer the practice (personal interview, March 2018). This follows, in a way, with Mark Feldman's comment at the Seifert workshop that jazz violinists have to 'invite people into their sound' because the instrument is relatively marginalized and unfamiliar. In trying to find a way through the intersection of gender and jazz violin, I see gender as incidental but ultimately unavoidable. Creative practice has to take the lead in staking a claim for the violin in jazz before one can effectively engage with the gender issue.

## 4.3 Race

In my short jazz experience, I have found that my race and ethnicity define my practice, or at least, allow others to make judgements about what my practice could be. Being racially

Chinese, in a jazz school that has a majority Caucasian studentship, made me conscious of my difference – unavoidably so. It seems as if my difference might have been less marked in America, where there are more Asian jazz musicians. Certainly, the creative strides taken by musicians such as Vijay Iyer, Helen Sung, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Kevin Sun, and Hiromi has been heartening, and so too their reception. Scholarship on Asian American jazz by writers like Deborah Wong, Fred Ho, and Vijay Iyer also provides a frame of reference. However, in Australia and the United Kingdom, where I trained, racial integration in jazz exists on a smaller scale (or perhaps on different cultural terrain). That is not to say that there are no British Asian jazz musicians, with the likes of Arun Ghosh, Zoe Rahman, and Yazz Ahmed forging a new jazz identity in Britain. Yet, based on my experience and observation, choices in higher education still replicate racial convention. By and large, Asian students choose to study Western classical music over jazz. This may be the effect of a colonial past that associates Western culture with an elite class. (The signification of 'Asian' also changes in different contexts: where 'Asian American' typically refers to East Asian ethnicities, 'British Asian' implies groups from South Asia.)[17] Unlike most forms of study, music is almost always begun at a young age. If choices are made by racial convention in higher education, they are the consequences of much earlier decisions (by parents) to participate in Western art culture.

The last two decades have seen a sharp increase in young musicians from Asia in Western art music – often dominating international competitions, elite institutions and such.[18] Grace Wang analyses this phenomenon as a site for the circulation of race, class, and

[17] Vijay Iyer (2014) shares his experience as a young musician being invited to join Asian Improv. Unsure how his identity as a South Asian would fit in an Asian American context, he uses terms like 'awkward' and 'weren't quite ready'. My first encounter of racial perception in the UK came in official forms with designations such as 'Asian' and 'Chinese'. To my mind, I am both and find the distinction unusual.

[18] As I write, five of the six finalists of the 2018 Menuhin Competition (Junior Division) are of East Asian ethnicities.

cultural hierarchies, beginning with so-called 'music moms' at specialist schools in America. She finds that classical music is perceived as a 'universalizing field of elite culture' that generates cultural capital for Asian immigrants to challenge racist structures (2009:899). Her study is based on young musicians at a junior conservatory, but its conclusions likely extend to older students and their families, too. Wang identifies the superior work ethic required (and possessed) by the children and the implied sophistication of their parents as negotiations of status in a context that 'racial discrimination and linguistic limitations continue to represent real economic and social barriers' (p.897). Her study illuminates some attitudes that resonate with me as a 'cultural migrant', but my position as an international student – thus temporary resident – always situated me rather differently. Nevertheless, my training did begin with Western classical music, which remains relevant to my ongoing practice; and among the names I can list of Asian American jazz musicians, very few are violinists. Indeed, I use my identity as a classical violinist to provide musical legitimacy in negotiating my place in jazz and improvisation – much in the same way that these Asian 'music moms' utilize classical music as cultural capital.

I am not excluding gender identity from the intersectionality of my analysis, but I have come to the conclusion that gender issues themselves rarely inform my practice. Neither am I aware of my creative work fundamentally changing the perceived status of my gender. If I encounter a gendered difference, it is from a sociological not artistic perspective. In many instances, female musicians have been told that they 'sound like a man', but the absence of a 'feminine sound' is not an assertion of an especially 'masculine sound'. Rather, it is a projection onto of the perceived masculinity of jazz practice in general. A gendered sound is a listener's association of the body in performance to the sound it creates, not a performer's construction of the sound she makes. Conversely, ethnic identity may have

more effect on creative work and sound, because of its closer connection with cultural experience. Ethnic identity is also less easily visible than gender identity; and thus, the practice of ethnicity is more nuanced, and can be constructed by the individual. For example, while I am 'racially' Chinese, I do not subscribe to an identity as ethnically Chinese – whatever that may mean in general or to me specifically. Furthermore, my ethnic identity as a Malaysian Chinese is constructed by many other factors of culture and society outside my racialized body. Here, I am suggesting that the common attachment to the body of ideological concepts such as gender or ethnicity is ineffective. Butler maintains that corporeality is a 'process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter' (1993:9). In many respects, gender identity is still constructed by the materiality of sex, making corporeal the intersection of power, control, performance, and agency. Ethnic identity by contrast is less dependent on a functional performance of physical attributes, but rather on cultural influence, thus allowing for a personal construction of identity through creative performance.

Susan McClary and Robert Walser outline the relationship of dance and the body to African-American aesthetics of music, suggesting that African American music's corporeal emphasis 'enable[s] its containment and dismissal' (Wong, 2004:172). Their position is dangerously close to a Cartesian mind/body split, in which the African body is representative of primitive experience while intellectual discourse lies in the domain of the enlightened European. In trying to inscribe the articulations of the body among achievements of African American music, the challenge is to avoid collapsing discussions of difference. Instead, Wong suggests thinking of the musicking body as 'necessarily racialized' so that we can stop analysing cultural labour disingenuously. She uses this as a method of drawing in and engaging with an Asian American sound and performing body (p.170). While

it is unavoidable that my racial identity will influence how I am perceived, it should not dictate how I produce and present my creative work.

Meanwhile, jazz scholarship has rarely ventured beyond a Black/White duality and this situation remains at the heart of critical engagement for Asian American musicians. In my case, the connections of jazz with racial discourse is made messier by my background in classical music (which is closely associated with the Asian community). However, I am not trying to represent Asian jazz musicians in my research, and I don't see my creative work as reflective of my 'home' community – which, in any case, was not my entry point into jazz. However, without a specific community to represent, I find belonging a harder prospect, which may make my practice (and myself) something of a loose cannon. The broader question I am asking is: does my ethnic identity affect my practice and how do I negotiate it through music? The answer is 'yes' but the 'how' is more complex and unstable. Because I am still a minority musician in most situations, I find colleagues' reactions to me veer wildly between giving me free range and blanking me creatively. I have to adapt my practice accordingly, either to meet uncertain expectations or to create certain expectations. But then, the presence of the violin in non-classical settings already holds enough volatility of expectation to make isolating the role of race and ethnicity difficult.

A case in point: 'You sound just like Sophie's grandfather!' This was a comment I received after a jam session to which my friend and fellow violinist (Sophie) was listening with her father. To find my performance compared to that of an 'old white man' (who does indeed improvise on the violin) was surprising and offers some insights as to what might be heard in my playing. Simply, the listener was drawing on a personal encounter with improvisation on the violin and making a connection – which in no way attaches any racial signifiers. However, the associations I drew from that comment caused to me think

specifically about my racial identity, rather than my age, gender or other defining characteristics. Given that Asian musicians are often cast as secondary practitioners of Western classical music (an identity to which I relate), the commentary became racialized in my perception, though that surely wasn't its intention. In trying to analyse the encounter, I asked: How can I, as an Asian female musician, sound un-classical, or indeed like a white male? In some ways, this felt like belonging – a validation of my developing jazz skills. In other ways, this was the first step in taking ownership of my musical style. Unlike in playing classical music, I had never felt like I could be a legitimate jazz musician. The changing forms, tempi, keys, arrangements and, above all, the improvisation requires a specific skill-set that seemed to me not so much acquired knowledge as an expressive identity. That is, I could try to replicate the arrangements and solos in jazz, but could I ever fully convince someone that it is 'my music'? At least, not in the same way that I could in classical music, measured by certain rules. But here, finally, I was being heard as someone I am not!

My reflections above are an indication of what I imagine to be racialized listening or of being able to 'hear the racialized conditioning of bodily and musical behaviour' (Wong, 2004:174). Listening to a recording that featured ethnically diverse musicians, a majority of them Asian American, Deborah Wong discovered that her friend (who is an African American musician and historian) could identify an absence of African American sound, without attempting to identify what an Asian American sound would be. Yoko Suzuki made a similar discovery in her interview with a black female saxophonist who could identify a non-African American sound but fell short of specific description, making comparisons to African American sounds by using terms like 'it's cultural' and 'in the blood' (2013:217). These examples ground the common trope that jazz is tied to the African American body. Meg Okura confirms this with her experience of being 'seen as' an Asian violinist and

'sounding Asian'. According to her account, most American audiences expect an Asian female violinist to play classical music. However, the juxtaposition of Okura's perceived identity as a classical violinist with her strong bowing articulation have led her to be accepted as a jazz violinist. She plays under the auspices of her own ensemble, the Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble, whose racialized name was chosen deliberately. Because racial bias in listening is unconsciously ingrained in us, Okura explains, she uses this human tendency to her advantage. She locates her music in a context that makes it sound 'more Asian', while she remains open, artistically, to diverse influences. Okura finds that this gives her creative licence, while possibly generating more interest in her work. 'Trying to play jazz on the violin was hard enough, and I just didn't feel like fighting against racial identity as well' (personal interview, March 2018). This strategy echoes Francis Wong's opinion that musicians are fully aware of their personal histories and identities, and that their performances (or 'aural autobiographies') are selectively crafted with emotional and political awareness – adding that 'playing' race is a conscious choice. He does not confirm that race is musically audible, however, and altogether avoids associating specific sounds with a specific body, preferring to focus on 'hearing how people think about creativity' (Wong, 2004:176).

Musicians thus take different approaches to making race inconsequential in their music. Francis Wong approaches it from a listener's perspective by recognizing and resisting the essentializing nature of associating sound to the body. Meanwhile, Meg Okura takes a musician's practical approach in which she plays into racialized perspectives in order to have greater creative leverage, if not, control. But which model should I adopt to satisfactorily and effectively present my creative work – and 'satisfactorily and effectively' for whom? For the most part in my fieldwork, I generate projects in order to analyse my creative process –

which means I take a musician's approach to managing identity politics while creatively engaging with music. However, I fluctuate into a listener's approach when I anticipate how I will be received and try to craft my music to fit or subvert those perceptions. In this way, I make my music contingent on my identity rather than allowing my identity to emerge from my creative work. This can be problematic. Previously, I have been told just to 'do my own thing' and not to 'put the cart before the horse'. These comments came from a white male musician, who may lack empathy for my inner turmoil, but I have to agree with his pragmatism.

Still, other expressions of gender and race intersect with jazz practice in professional life. In particular, Suzuki shares an experience of being told she is 'hot commodity' because a female saxophonist has a rarity value lacking to that of her white male colleague (2013:207). She does not infer a racial meaning, and perhaps it is not there, but I hear it implied in the comment, too. Indeed, her colleague draws a comparison between his racial position and her gender position, which crosses the two aspects of social valuation. Her account parallels my own experience with a white male guitarist, who thought jazz promoters would rather take a chance on me than him because I was an 'unknown quantity' with an exotic name. Of course, it is only an exotic name in a Western European context.

Perhaps, that is why Meg Okura chooses not to give her name to her ensemble, instead using 'Pan Asian' to represent her creative work.[19] I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, a label voids the descriptive applications ('exotic') that a musician's name can carry. On the other, a label imposes a prescriptive character which may restrict rather than release the potential of creative work. In any case, I am not sure what to make of my

[19] Her most recent album, IMA IMA (2018), is credited with 'Meg Okura and The Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble'. It is not clear what intentions she has with nominative distinctions of different projects she has led over the years.

colleague's opinion, except that it is completely untrue. There are the same barriers for all working musicians, who must promote themselves and find suitable collaborators, in the hope that the music will eventually speak for itself. Having said that, I agree there can be different expectations of creative work, arising from factors more or less out of one's control. It is the intersectionality of identity that make my analysis less straightforward. I am also mindful that my racial difference is most keenly felt where I am the minority; this analysis would be very different in my home country, though there too identity difference would be an unavoidable factor of it.

Ultimately, I cannot ignore the listener's perspectives on me – which may be their most constructive form of engagement with the music – even if they generate undue representations. A musician is able to manipulate musical features for their own projection, but social constructions of a musical performance are shared among the whole community. Even if no one picks up on the musical references, everyone can and will respond to social aspects of a performance. As a player, I easily become self-conscious, particularly given that I do not represent any one community and subsequently (reactively) try to belong to many. I believe that musicians fluctuate between their own practice and a listener's perspective as both sides inform the creative outcome. However, this fluctuation also disrupts how I imagine my research work will be constructed and makes reflexive analysis an additional burden in articulating my creative process. That is, even as I consider the next steps of my practice, I am also considering potential research outcomes of my work and drawing relevance from both.

This discussion highlights the difficulty to distinguish between parts of my identity relating to my creative work, but it is also tied in with that of my research work. While my research and practice have me on the same goal of producing creative works, they may not

stem from the same motivation (as discussed in Chapter 1). As standard research practice obliges me to investigate every possibility to get as balanced a perspective as possible, my creative instinct does not take me down that road (or indeed, down every road). Artistic research is about managing the tension between research and practice in a way that does not compromise knowledge or disrupt creative work. I am slowly coming to the understanding that artistic research is a working paradox. Research and creative practice should be viewed as two aspects that are held in tension of each, not in contrast. A composite picture of this model is explored in my next chapter through the various case studies I present.

# Chapter 5 - The Self(s)

This final chapter focusses on three case studies that highlight issues I consider critical to my practice. These projects also represent my range of creative interests and the skills I have adapted for them. In each case, they have produced large-scale works and performances which are documented in the Portfolio: Recordings. While the Portfolio contains major portions of this work, my discussion here investigates smaller sections in order to draw out the big issues in relation to elements of the music. Since not all aspects of music-making are strictly musical, my discussions also consider social relationships in and around the practice, which form an important part of the process. My accounts draw upon earlier chapters, on such matters as instrumental technique, identity and sound, musicianship in ensembles, and improvisatory models; but here I pull them together, to give a better sense of my creative practice in the round. An over-arching theme, from my perspective, is the volatile, mythical, and 'unbelonging' practice of jazz violin.

## 5.1 Case 1: London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO)

As with any relationship, musical relationships take time to achieve mutual understanding. But there are some free improvisation projects that expect no personal commitment – and the London Improvisers Orchestra is one. Each session sees guests join several long-time members who are often (but not always) present. In performance, the orchestra manages the irregularity of membership through the process of conduction. Unlike other free improvisation sessions (e.g. Mopomoso) which bring musicians together without a predetermined form, LIO has established a performance concept that incorporates both free improvisation (either as the full orchestra or a small group) and improvisation based on a set of accepted 'conduction' signals. These have accumulated over the years but are open

to new contributions from conductors. Occasionally, visiting conductors and musicians collaborate with the LIO on their personal projects, which has ceded both interesting and forgettable outcomes. During the eighteen months that I took part, I found interesting perspectives on both the music-making and the social dynamics of improvisation and conduction. I consider in particular how the violin can participate in these practices.

Conduction does not make it easy for musicians to strike out on their own. The sight of a conductor reprising gestures from the podium brings out familiar 'classical' instincts to follow directions. I wonder if conduction is a reverse-psychological way of dealing with authority, in which the musician chooses how – and if – to improvise on the signals directed at them. Still, a non-reaction, while legitimate in a sense, for me borders too closely to an act of musical anarchism to align with playing in an ensemble. Indeed, in LIO, I found myself so preoccupied with interpreting the signals correctly that the practice became more restrictive than I expected. Each session begins with a run-through of the conduction signals for the benefit of guest musicians and non-regular members. Occasionally, a conductor may choose to articulate his/her concept for the piece to be performed. One such occasion saw a female conductor (the only one in my time with LIO), who was also a regular member, lead the run-through of signals, along with her concept of 'Listening'. This featured two signals for 'Process' and 'Anti-Process', whose explanations were so abstract that they did not obviously translate into sound. How should one think about the creative process and sound out its 'difficulty' (Process) or 'ease' (Anti-Process)? If this thesis is any indication, it is difficult enough to articulate one's creative process in words, much less to 'sonicize' it. After some further explanation, questions, and several try-outs, one male member made some sardonic remarks about the whole concept – which the conductor quickly dismissed,

reminding the orchestra of his past rudeness to her. It was a sour and tense moment in the rehearsal, which I felt that regular members of LIO did not want to allow to escalate.

This kind of experience debunks long-standing myths about creativity as a 'democratic', 'co-operative activity' that is 'pro-social' and 'encourages communication and feelings of empathy' (Oakley, 2009:405). It underlines the complexity of human relations in social formations, which even improvisation fails to overcome. Furthermore, it brings to a head the social and conceptual discrepancy between improvisation and creativity. Earlier discussions (in Chapter 3) uncovered ways in which creativity in music lay outside improvisation, or improvisation may fail to embody creativity. There could be many reasons why the 'Process/Anti-Process' conduction did not succeed, namely: it was conceptually under-prepared; it was presented by a female conductor; it was late in the rehearsal and the orchestra wanted to have dinner; or there was bad blood in the past. The resolution to flaring tensions came from another female member standing up to move the conversation along, explaining that in conduction it is ultimately up to the individual whether to respond to a signal or not –even when a conductor directly signals to a player. This is to remove the socially constructed power of the conductor and to emphasize creative equity among the ensemble. Still, it is difficult to look past the ingrained power relations of conductor and orchestra, which are cemented by the perception of audience members, who contribute to the social construct. In fact, for its stated aims of creative equity, conduction is impossible to square with social equity.

Other factors also perpetuate socially constructed forms of power. With regards to this particular incident, it is interesting to note that none of the male conductors of LIO spoke up to control the situation or to suggest creative alternatives; an in-group camaraderie seemed to mean that they preferred not to get involved. By putting social

status before creative value, they inadvertently demonstrated the importance of close relationships to creative success. Since I was merely a guest performer with LIO and didn't interact with members outside of these sessions, however, I gained little insight into their personal relationships. The 'Process/Anti-Process' concept continues to be employed, even if one still overhears the occasional grumble about it during break times from members who were present at that incident. Nevertheless, the conductor got her way.

Another point about creative practice in improvisation is that individual brilliance is secondary to the collective sound. An improvised performance (even one that is directed) can only achieve success collectively, no matter how amazing a musician's playing. Furthermore, a creatively engaging and musically satisfying improvisation requires more than following conduction signals, but interpreting them, listening to the results, and contributing to the collective sound. Bailey even suggests that improvisation is more a measure of means than ends, a way of making music (1992:142). There are various interpretations of signals, and various ways in which each idea might develop – especially when new signals or new members are introduced. Sometimes I would stop because I felt I could not contribute further, while other violinists beside me continued on a given signal. An individual who diverges may face backlash from the conductor or appear to the audience as defiant; I have seen stern looks thrown in the direction of musicians who have misread conduction signals. But why such a case should be seen as 'defiance' or 'misreading' instead of 'improvisation' is open for debate. In an ensemble, individuality is admired but collectivity, i.e., in-group identification (or critically, obedience), is always more appreciated. It never occurred to me to break away from the conduction completely because it seemed designed for a specific musical purpose. After all, LIO includes a free improvisation piece in each session as well. However, I did find myself on a few occasions itching to participate,

though no signal was forthcoming. Could I have defied the conductor and put my sound out there regardless, in the name of improvisation? What takes priority here – the music or the collective? How do I get heard?

Coming back to the discourse on social interaction in music, improvisation provides a running commentary on power play because the unscripted nature of the performance is mostly dialectically-driven. Furthermore, in conduction, the power is implied in how the improvisation occurs. Yet, any collective of musicians has a silent hierarchy. It derives from factors such as longevity in the ensemble, consistency of performance, and the advantage of experience over youth. My participation as a young, unknown musician invariably put me in the back seat of creative situations with the LIO. I checked my ego at the door yet still wanted to influence the shape of the improvisation. I was eager to prove myself and keener still to respond to the music. Even apart from my social obscurity, however, my instrument is not dynamically forceful. This is a significant point as the signals given by the conductor are the result of him/her reacting to the orchestra as well as leading it in constructing the improvisation. Louder instruments, such as the brass and percussion, typically have the upper hand while, as a violinist, I never felt I could influence the conduction process. Or, rather, I had to be given the opportunity to do so, dependent either on the musical curiosity of the conductor, or an opportune (read: quiet enough) moment in the improvisation.

Opportunities to solo or to start off an improvisation came few and far between for me, all granted (notably) by the same conductor. My earlier discussions (Chapter 4) have shown how essential social relationships are in developing creativity. In improvised conduction, this relationship helps to establish ways of being heard because one is only as creative as one who is heard. This relationship with the conductor might be based on two factors: musical assurance and musical curiosity. As a new member, I had to prove my

musical worth to the rest of the ensemble, and particularly, to the conductor if I wanted an opportunity to be heard. Musical assurance is one that is developed over time, depending on various musical and social circumstances. However, trying to generate musical curiosity in another is not as straightforward as being an 'unknown quality/quantity'. In my time with the LIO, the musical curiosity of conductors seemed to be piqued by guests (such as I was in my early days), and more specifically by guests who played uncommon instruments (which, for once, excluded the violin). Even so, throughout my time at LIO, I found myself being offered musical opportunities that were a result of positive social relationships, based more on musical assurance than on musical curiosity.

It is tough for any musician to be heard, even in a supposedly democratic context for music-making such as free improvisation. My anxiety and frustration about this form stems from its ambiguous and unquantifiable practice. As Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz write about improvisation, it balances opposing values in a dialectical synthesis – in which imagination is counterpoised with discipline, ego with empathy, and self-assertion with self-effacement (2013:xiii). These values are easily lost in the collective creative effort, but doesn't everyone deserve to be heard? Given the history of improvisation, it would seem so, not because of musical merit necessarily, but because of the immense significance of improvisation in articulating freedom, recognizing otherness, and bearing testimony (Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz, 2013:63). The huge literature on improvisation and social momentum, by writers such as Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (2004), and with George Lipsitz (2013); Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman (2016); Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw (2017); and to an extent the personal stories shared by Derek Bailey (1992) and David Toop (2016), lend perspective to the importance of improvisation as expressive narrative and memory. In a more modest way, improvisation is for me a practice that expresses

subjectivities and shared belonging of creative space. Without that agenda, creativity does not reflect social narratives and thus lacks any real meaning.

Why is being heard so important to me? The reasons are numerous, whether the context is conducted improvisation or a jam session (as discussed in Chapter 2). Being heard may lead to other opportunities which offer a chance to develop as a musician.[20] In fact, not being heard demonstrates that a lot more than musical ability is necessary to advance one's career. That is, all the technical aspects of playing that I have spent long years crafting and perfecting are of no use if no one hears me. The extra-musical factors that I need to navigate my creative environment are largely circumstantial, include finding the opportunity to present my work and learning how to facilitate working creatively with others. Critically, being heard enables a musical response, which in turn directs my creative practice. In this respect, free improvisation is more difficult to manage than a jam session, because of its unpredictability. We have to collectively, consciously, and continuously work to provide platforms for each other to participate. For free improvisation to have meaning, it cannot occur by pure happenstance; its creative work has to be intentional. That is, 'in a world filled with paths that we can or must take, improvisation compels us to think about the paths we can make' (Fischlin, Heble, Lipsitz, 2013:xii).

Portfolio: Recordings – London Improviser's Orchestra (2017-2018) [21]

## 5.2 Case 2: TriYeoh

My trio began as a project for my Master's programme, without any firm idea what kind of music we would make. In part, I wanted to conform to convention and sign up to the jazz

[20] My performance as part of the Veryan Weston Trio at Warsaw Improvisation Festival is an example of that (See Chapter 3). On 6th August 2018, the trio recorded a live concert at the Vortex Jazz Club for Polish record label, Fundacja *sluchaj*! (https://sluchaj.org/). Full album at: https://sluchaj.bandcamp.com/album/four-seasonings

[21] More information at: http://www.londonimprovisersorchestra.co.uk/musicians.html

tradition – and there is no more legitimate way to do that nowadays than in the equalizing space of an educational institution. At the same time, I wanted to push back at the traditional forms of jazz which rarely had room for a violinist – and similarly (ironically), there is no better way to access a supportive creative space than in an educational institution. My training had exposed me to mainstream jazz works and values. I was tired of defending my creative work in various contexts and wanted to distance myself, particularly, from standard instrumentation and repertoire. I felt that if I stripped these away, I would stand a chance of presenting my sound and style without the unhelpful oversight of tradition. The discomfort that I felt in my early stages playing jazz was gradually receding, as I realized that my authenticity as a jazz musician could not be asserted from the point of view of historical practice. In that context, I would continue to feel apologetic or defensive about my work and would continue to face resistance (unconscious or otherwise) to my position as a violinist, as an Asian, or as a female musician. Therefore, I needed to take control of the practical aspects of my work to ensure that they reflected my environment and my identity.

One of the first things I did was to strip down my ensemble to a less common texture, while retaining a familiar form. By not using a chordal instrument such as a piano or guitar, I created an opportunity to open my ears harmonically, no longer guided by another musician's chord voicings. This was not done to reject collaboration, but it was to gain greater control of my work. Furthermore, I found that I could do with a trio most that I could with a quartet. That is, I did not have to change my playing style radically despite the absence of a chordal instrument. Eventually, however, I realised that I could explore new possibilities *because of* the absence of a chordal instrument. This came about when I started writing my own pieces and arrangements, which facilitated a new approach. As I

investigated different ideas and styles in my writing, I began to expect a new sound from myself and from the ensemble. Such development of my sound and style in practice is what I now identify to be 'practice-as-research'.

The changes in my jazz playing have been gradual. They have come alongside my progress in other forms of music, such as free improvisation, contemporary music, and (surprisingly) klezmer music. While many traditions utilize the violin in non-classical settings, such as folk music, world music, gypsy jazz/manouche, or Latin jazz, none of these forms are recognized as mainstream jazz and they are rarely explored in formal education. My turn towards klezmer came during my postgraduate studies when I was exploring the music of John Zorn and his use of improvising string players. In particular, his works by the Masada String Trio was interesting for me as it comprises a sparse line up of violin, cello, and double bass. Apart from being a notable avant-garde composer and saxophonist, Zorn is the ultimate musical omnivore. His range of works is compellingly broad and multiple styles may coexist in a single song, as captured by his two ensembles: Naked City and the Masada Quartet. The Masada project came out of his huge compositional volumes exploring his Jewish heritage, composing about 500 songs altogether. He modelled the Masada Quartet after Ornette Coleman's quartet of saxophone, trumpet, bass, and drums – notably without a chordal instrument.[22] Learning klezmer music and discovering Zorn's Masada works came together fortuitously to influence my own compositions and my playing.

Klezmer is a part of my musical identity that I identify with through anti-identification. Since I am from a Muslim nation, I had grown up in a context in which Jewish

[22] The Masada project is Zorn's musical conception of 'radical Jewish music'. Among other ensembles associated with it are Masada String Trio, Masada Quintet, Bar Kokhba, and Electric Masada. More information on Zorn's works at: www.tzadik.com

identification is disallowed or even criminalized. Thus, my fascination with listening to Jewish music was tied with the illicit – and then came the rarefied opportunity to learn klezmer as an elective for my postgraduate course. To my untrained ear, the Jewish scales sounded similar to those of Arabic music – and this is not surprising, considering their shared cultural heritage. I was excited to hear music that seemed familiar and to play something that resonated with me, albeit surprisingly – not just as an improvising violinist, but as one with an Islamic background. Yet, there were problems in my approach. Since I am neither Jewish nor Muslim, the association I had was based purely on aural familiarity. I would hear Arabic tones in the daily call-to-prayer, from the *nasheed* (or as we call it *nasyid*) groups in my country, on the radio, on national television, or in small doses in our art songs. But even at home, I am of the minority 'race', one that does not have legal ties to Islam and hence is not perceived as one with an Arabic-influenced culture. It is undeniably part of my cultural stock as a Malaysian, however, to be exposed to the Arabic soundscapes that are used in our art songs. The same applies to Hindustani and Indian-Karnatic music, which too form part of my country's aural environment.

Problematic suppositions aside, klezmer became my reference for a new sound. I learnt new scales (*freygish, misheberach*), how to play *krekhts* (cry-tone/sobs), and other sonic characteristics of the music. This required me to change aspects of my technique and my concept of intonation (micro-tones became of great interest). It altered my sound from an adaptation of classical style to a different tone colour altogether. In klezmer, the clarinet is typically the lead melodic instrument, but the violin is the lead ensemble instrument – and this is familiar territory again for me. Just as an orchestra would have its own soloist, the lead musician (concert master) is always the violinist. It seems to me that the versatility of the violin allows it to take melodic lines while also filling out harmonic sections. Similarly,

in a klezmer ensemble, the violin switches between melodic and harmonic parts, playing counterpoint melodies and block chords with a klezmer-type 'swing'. This requires a good ear to play a counter-melody to the clarinet and secure intonation to comp with double stops on the violin. The use of odd time signatures is also common in klezmer music and in this it is close to Eastern-European gypsy music. (Portfolio: Recordings – A Touch of Klez)

Improvisation is also a key element in playing klezmer, not just knowing how and when to switch between melodic and harmonic roles or selecting the right ornamentations, but it is featured in playing a *doyne*. A *doyne* is a soloistic section over a drone in which the violin or other lead instrument plays over a specific change of chords in relatively free time, typically used as an introduction to a *nign* (Jewish religious song). I incorporated this practice into one of my compositions, 'Llama Klezmallah', which combines elements of klezmer with ideas that I am exploring in jazz, of odd time signatures and lateral key changes (Portfolio: Audio 7). To aid my compositional ideas, I returned to studying virtuosic pieces on the violin, revisiting the music of Bartók for its folk songs and irregular time writing, and maintaining a regime of Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas that I continue to this day. My playing is by no means a like-rendition of any one style; rather, an exploration of different influences and techniques that reflect my background and training. As I began to build a palette of sound, grounded in essential violin techniques, it allowed me to learn, play, and switch between different styles. I then crafted a personal sound that is an amalgamation of all my practices. What my jazz training brought to my sound was not the use of Blues, or swing phrasing, or even harmonic complexity. Rather, it gave me 'improvisatory nous', or what I consider a 'jazz ethic', to enhance the possibilities of my music.

Despite the accumulation of skills and styles, the key element of tying it all together was improvisation – that is, in the improvising Self. It was not enough to have the tools and

the materials to work with; I now had to piece together a cohesive sound that felt natural to me and for me. This sound also had to be musically relevant to the other musicians that I collaborate with. In many respects, crafting a personal sound was – and still is – an experimental process, improvised towards by playing with different musicians and styles. A given sound does not always work and, even when it does, it may change. The most exciting is when it evolves within a familiar ensemble. Just as Evan Parker reveals that the people he has worked with the longest offer him the 'freest situation to work in' (Bailey, 1992:128), I find this true of TriYeoh. In this sense, his comment is not restricted to the context of free improvisation, but refers to any sum of moments in which individuals experience and interact together in music. That is, extending how comfortable we are being free with each other in honesty, openness, and sincerity through the various musical situations that we face. Ensembles that are made up of strong relationships revel in pushing creative boundaries for each other, in what Parker describes as the 'freest situation to work in'. This improvisatory ethos allows us to experiment, to take risks, and to trust that each of us will hold up the others. It changes our perspective on the sound that we're pursuing and creates a dynamic experience – one that is challenging, engaging, and pleasurable. Such a relationship presupposes the fact that the ensemble has worked together for a long time, in order to achieve musical flexibility and unrestrained creativity.

Time is a luxury that one does not always have, however. As part of my fieldwork, TriYeoh has rehearsed together on a semi-regular basis for the past two years. Although the ensemble dates originally from my Master's years, some time has passed since and we had a new bass player. Ash was brought into the band by Jim, who plays with so many musicians in town that he knows who he works with best. Since he was familiar with the music we do in TriYeoh, I trusted his suggestion, and was relieved to avoid the hurdle of searching for a

bass player (a common pursuit). Furthermore, it is important to me that my rhythm section have good rapport with each other, more so even than with me. Necessarily, my modus operandi as a jazz violinist has always been to be flexible and to find a way to fit in. If any adaptations need to be made, they have to come from me – this much has been clear since early in my training. Nevertheless, with a trio, any personnel change is major. The bass in particular carries the ensemble by pivoting between rhythmic and harmonic support, delivered in a melodic line that also has a textural function. This was not as simple as 'patching up' the rhythm section.

With a new member of whom to be mindful, one of our first activities in rehearsal was to improvise freely. I find this a useful ice-breaker as there is no pressure on anyone to play particularly 'intelligently', and it encourages an instinctive approach. More than that, it requires listening intently, which might otherwise get lost in a warm-up piece. Free improvisation is the perfect tool to learn about each other's styles, without referencing expected performative standards in a jazz piece. It prepares ears and hands for a fruitful rehearsal. In this way, free improvisation reveals the value of one's performance style as much as it removes any preconceived impressions while fostering creative transcendence (as discussed in Chapter 3). For example, I did not discover until later that Ash is a non-trained musician and does not read notation well. Instead, what I learnt from improvising with him was that he is an exceptional listener and has great instincts for progressing the music – which is evidence of an experienced musician. He cements a solid rhythm section (expectedly) and he also has great harmonic-melodic sensibility (unexpectedly). His background as a guitarist informs his bass-playing, which is stylistically different to conventional bass styles. All this I would never have learned if our first encounter had been to play my music or standard jazz repertoire. These would, to an extent, have restricted his

natural style, and crucially, have emphasised what he is not rather than revealing his personal sound and approach.

Improvising freely together became the reformed TriYeoh's creative process. Since we lacked the natural unfolding of time and space to grow as an ensemble, free improvisation became vital as a fast track to musical understanding. This was an improvised experience but one we engaged in consistently and consciously. We were not improvising freely for the sake of improvising freely. Rather, we were improvising freely because we wanted to get to know each other's playing better, so as to enjoy going on that journey together even more. We also came to use improvisation to construct a performance around a piece, as an introduction, solo section, open section, transition, or ending. With the score internalized, improvisation (free or otherwise) became whatever we wished it to be as we played – using 'play' here in the deeper sense that Stephen Nachmanovitch draws from the ancient Sanskrit word '*lila*'.[23] The deliberateness of our free improvisation was important here as it made us selective about the sounds that we created individually. The feedback in, out, and through the composition helped to ensure that the improvisation was purposeful. Tim Berne shared a similar perspective at a masterclass, saying that the aim of our creative work should be 'making improvised music sound written and making written music sound improvised'. In other words, it is about music moving seamlessly between form and practice. This, I think, is what had been lacking in the previous incarnation of TriYeoh. Also, for Jim and I, time apart had provided us with other musical experiences that have shaped our personal styles. I had become more assured in my own sound, more certain about how

[23] There is an old Sanskrit word, *lîla*, which means play. Richer than our word, it means divine play, the play of creation, destruction, and re-creation, the folding and unfolding of the cosmos. *Lîla*, free and deep, is both the delight and enjoyment of this moment, and the play of God. It also means love (Nachmanovitch, 1990:1).

to use improvisation, and more flexible as to how my identity as a violinist, composer, and band leader could fit in – and thus, how to synthesize these positions.

Ultimately, what I discovered was a willingness to improvise within my circumstances. It took some measure of maturity to accept that I could not fight reality or the position in which I found myself. I could not change any part of my identity. I would have preferred not to make personnel changes. I would have preferred not to be in an artificial creative setting – artificial to me because of the 'practice-as-research' tag I put on the ensemble. However, these circumstances obliged me to improvise an approach towards the creation of something musically significant that I could document and use. Through this process, I found greater stylistic elasticity. I am not quite saying that my research aims generated new musical activity because that could negate analysis of the creative process; in time I would probably have developed a similar practice anyway. But circumstances that presented themselves, notably the time constraint and a new member, necessitated me to find ways to 'belong' in this – or any – musical situation. The improvisatory ethos that I had learnt as part of my jazz training proved itself in a new context, giving me more options as a musician to participate, and consequently, to belong.

Even so, the artificiality of an ensemble created as a laboratory (though I try not to think of it as such) continues to trouble me. Several scholar-performers I have spoken to about practice-based research have indicated that one has to be active as a performer before engaging in research. This allows the work to emerge from the practice, not vice versa. As a professional musician, however, my performances prior to this research were driven by commercial demand more than creative practice. Even as a student, I had felt that I had to adhere to certain standards and a limited range of outcomes dictated by a jazz programme. But as a music researcher, I have been able to focus on my playing without

worrying about perfection, since I would not be subject to performance rubrics. Nevertheless, commercial pressures have remained part of my creative (and hence, research) activities, if only because I work with professional musicians in this project. This is something that I must acknowledge even as, temporarily, my priorities have been different from theirs. Somewhere in this web of overlapping identities – of researcher, musician, and gigging professional – I have located my practice, trying not to overly compromise any one.

Commercial validation is an unavoidable aspect of creative work, particularly that which is a result of collaborative effort. Musicians want to be validated by paid gigs and an attentive audience, yet this is difficult to guarantee, especially when the goal is research. As such, I have had greater insecurities about musicians choosing to play with me, when I could not offer certainty of work. Some musicians have also dropped out of my practice-as-research project (understandably) because it demanded time and effort for little or no financial reward. Although my ensembles could work towards a studio recording for use in a press kit, this was little leverage in the context that their future was always uncertain: I did not have sufficient time to dedicate to promotion and I would return home anyway. The issue was especially pressing in the case of TriYeoh, which was of most longstanding (albeit not continuous).

With prospects of commercial work poor, the only compelling reason for musicians to work with me were creative and/or social. It is no surprise, then, that these are the attributes of the creative process that I discuss most. If it seems superficial also to think of creative work in terms of its economic reward (or lack thereof), it must be recognized that this is most commonly drives creative effort, if not spurs creative instinct. How long I could have sustained my creative collaborations without a commercial incentive for my musicians must remain an open question, as I have reached the end of my research period.

Portfolio: Recordings – TriYeoh.[24]

### 5.2a Second Interlude: JP-Pei Duo

This desire for commercial validation has also driven me to consider composing differently, trying to make my work more accessible to listeners (Portfolio: Figure 5).[25] I acknowledge that there are other factors apart from repertoire that determine accessibility or commerciality, but I will not enter into that complex discussion. Instead, my simple consideration of accessibility is what I perceive to be tuneful pieces, with a clear form. If TriYeoh plays angular, riff-based pieces, the JP-Pei Duo plays more lyrical pieces with no free improvisation. Indeed, there were times when the trio's lack of a chordal instrument made it an imperfect vehicle for pieces that I had written with lush harmonies and chord progressions. They were possible, and their presentation in sparse counterpoint, alongside tunes built with riffs and grooves, created a unique combination of repertoire. Furthermore, TriYeoh's drummer was able to play with different textures, expanding the sound world of the ensemble.

Playing the same pieces with JP, however, it was satisfying to hear them with all the voicings that I had intended. An example of the difference may be heard in two versions of 'Unspoken Thoughts', played by TriYeoh (Portfolio: Audio 8) and with JP Muir (Portfolio: Audio 9). Compared to the example I considered in the previous section, this piece lacks klezmer influence, with jazz-type chord changes instead of a drone. It requires more conventionally violinistic melodic shaping and phrasing. I still explore odd-time signatures and phrasing across bars, as I did in 'Llama Klezmallah', but 'Unspoken Thoughts' seems to benefit more from the piano's harmonic depth than the rhythm section's pulse. Conversely,

[24] Debut album 'Futile' (March 2019) was released on FMR Records, FMRCD525-1218.

[25] I wrote a series of short pieces some of which are published in Snow Lit Rev 6 (ISBN: 978-0-907954-56-9).

groove-based music is harder to accomplish with JP, because the piano cannot supply the rhythmic interplay of drums and bass. Not that we don't also play pieces with an underlying groove and odd-time riffs on occasion, as in our rendition of Brigitte Beraha's 'Sometime' (Portfolio: Audio 10), but groove-playing is of a different nature without a rhythm section, more controlled and contained within form. A comparison against that would be TriYeoh playing John Zorn's 'Ezkadi' (Portfolio: Audio 11) whereby the rhythmic interplay between instruments is able to break down into free time and return into groove easier with the drums. The lack of harmonic progression also allows the music to move between sections based on rhythmic cues.

Another approach to playing 'accessible' music is taking popular tunes into a jazz context. This has been seen in examples of Miles Davis' reimagining of Disney tune 'Someday My Prince Will Come' (1961) and John Coltrane's epic modal jazz rendering of 'My Favourite Things' (1961). I have always found rearranging popular tunes for instrumental jazz to be a schmaltzy approach, especially where violins are concerned – and for a long-time avoided playing tunes, preferring instead to play pieces. I am aware the distinction between the two forms remain vague and my internalization may stem from my residual classical background. My view is that vocal songs are tunes, and instrumental works are pieces. Nevertheless, JP and I have reworked tunes like *'*Fragile' by Sting (Portfolio: Audio 12), and 'Blackbird' by The Beatles (Portfolio: Audio 13) into our repertoire. In working out our style and repertoire, we looked to our own influences (Regina Carter for me; and Brad Mehldau for JP) for inspiration. Both Carter and Mehldau have played these pieces respectively in their own projects.[26] Since our instrumentation already sets us up for

[26] Kenny Barron and Regina Carter *'Freefall'* (2001); Brad Mehldau Trio '*The Art of The Trio Volume One'* (1997)

schmaltzy expectations, I followed Meg Okura's lead and used my existing characteristics to my musical advantage, not view it as a burden. There is no need to avoid popular tunes when it can invite more people into our sound, and still be creatively engaging to me.

'Accessibility' is a delicate process to negotiate in practice as it might mean different things to me and JP respectively, but still has to represent a collective position in how we select our repertoire. Nevertheless, my instinct is to perform pieces that are best suited to a given ensemble, not to 'test' improbable choices as a research exercise. While these performances of my material are the outcomes of my creative rationales, they are also determined to an important degree by my collaborators and the sound that we generate collectively. On a separate note, JP-Pei duo project is reflected as an 'interlude' to the TriYeoh case study because it draws out similar aspects of my participation in a jazz tradition but in a different context. It also demonstrates the underlining impact male musicians can have in supporting women's creative work.

Portfolio: Recordings – JP-Pei Duo

## 5.3 Case 3: The Goodenough Band

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Berendt and Huesmann (2009) conclude that diversification of styles is important when practising jazz on the violin. To expand the possibilities, I have found it is essential to have the right improvisatory ethos, or in Grappelli's terms, a 'can-do' approach. I have brought that to most of my musical experiences in London, including to some situations that I never expected would be relevant to my research – in this case, an ensemble comprising both professionals and amateurs, very much a hobbyist band. I do not say that to undermine our project, because the music we play (and I can only speak for my part) is 'creatively engaging and musically satisfying' – to quote the challenge I issued myself in Chapter 3. Still, we did not form the band for any other purpose than to jam with each

other and to put on the occasional free concert at college. This is one of the most accessible projects in which I have been involved, mainstream and yet distinctive. It encompasses all the aspects of performance that interest me as a performer and researcher: improvisation, stylistic diversity, and accessibility.

While my research as a whole has aimed to find different contexts for the violin to be heard, I found in this case that the violin was simply not appropriate for every song. At our last concert, I played (apart from the violin) ukulele, mini-accordion, electric bass, and cello. (Portfolio: Video 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d).[27] Our electric guitarist Emanuel and I both do back-up vocals on some songs, too. In this project, I let my musical sensibility writ large override my inner violinist. That is, I consciously and deliberately looked beyond my role as a violinist to find other ways to contribute to the music. In essence, I tried to be a holistic musician. On reflection, this bears a close relationship with the rest of my research. Arguably, being a musical and social minority in jazz have led me to dig deeper for musical relevance in other forms, too. Since the paths have not been straightforward for me, I have learnt to be versatile in my approach. This project, like others, taught me new ways to negotiate my musical identity and to perform myself into relevance. Along the way, there have been challenges, arising precisely from a perception of my versatility – or in other words, the instability of my musical identity. Ironically, the more I have tried to assert my practice, the more fluid it has become.

As I have argued, outside the context of classical music and folk music, the violin has a limited identity. There is little imagination for what the violin can do musically, which has been an interesting challenge for me to overcome. Over the years, one way that violinists, in

[27] These video clips are taken from various performances and self-promotion material. For more information: https://www.facebook.com/TGBofficial/

common with pianists and sometimes cellists, have sought to bridge the gap with mainstream listeners is by producing 'classical crossover' music.[28] In popular music, classical instruments like the violin and cello have been used to great effect, such as in 'Eleanor Rigby' (1966) by The Beatles, most material by The Velvet Underground (with John Cale on the viola), 'Baba O'Riley' (1971) by The Who, and more recent examples like 'Secrets' (2009) by One Republic. However, the violin in the popular imagination has commonly been defined by the voice. This image was consolidated by Vanessa Mae in her 1998 album *Storm*, which features her singing on a few tracks. A decade later, the trend continues with 2009 Eurovision Song Contest winner, Alexander Rybak, who sang and played violin in his song 'Fairytale'.

There is also a common misconception that amplified or electric violin is a rock/jazz/pop instrument, contributing to the perception that violin performed outside the context of its acoustic purpose is not serious or creative work (indeed, leading to 'why jazz' enquiries). I still get 'Vanessa Mae comments' when I tell people I am a jazz violinist, or after performing at a non-Classical gig. It could be simply that we are both female, Asian violinists. To say nothing against Mae's work but audience perceptions seem to be rooted in social constructions more than musical features (as I explored in Chapter 4). That is, I do not imagine that Benet McLean finds himself positioned alongside Vanessa Mae, or conversely that Vanessa Mae is often compared to Jean-Luc Ponty. While this may be the result of an intersection between the violin and my identity with no reference to any musical styles, I sometimes experience the role that she has defined as a constraint on my performance.

[28] This is just a sample list: *The Violin Player* (2005), *The Classical Album 1* (1996) by Vanessa Mae, *The Piano Player* (2003) by Maksim Mrvica, *Bond* (2000) by Bond string quartet, *2Cellos* (2011) by 2Cellos.

Typically, the violin is used as an occasional feature in popular music, rather than an established member of a group. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the violin is not always stylistically well suited to pop-rock material. The second follows from the first in that having the long-term incongruence of the violin in a group may distract from the overall musical value of the piece and likely diminish the creative potential of the violin. Hence, steps are needed to overcome the outsider status of the violin, either by composing suitable material to showcase the violin (material change) or by finding a new context in which the violin can enhance the musical value of the ensemble (stylistic change). These issues are not wholly dissimilar to those I have experienced in jazz. In part they explain why I tend to prefer relatively small ensembles, like trios or duos, which make the violin a creative focus, materially and stylistically. With the Goodenough Band, there were instances when we considered adding a drummer, but I resisted the impulse: in part because it seemed an easy 'out' from interesting challenges, but more because it would have brought our sound back to a standard pop-rock configuration, which is unhelpful to a violinist. Instead, I tried to think about the specific relevance to our music, in terms of adding musical value, every time I used a new instrument.

The Goodenough Band allowed me to be a musician first, and a violinist second. Apart from the violin, I have some training in the piano and the cello, which has led me to pick up the accordion, electric bass, and ukulele with relative ease (all have keys or four strings). These instruments offered a natural extension of my practice of challenging the boundaries of the non-classical violin with improvisatory forms instilled in my jazz training. However, there was a degree of happenstance in my using these specific instruments, none of which I own. Given that the violin had little to offer in some songs, I was actively thinking of ways to overcome my musical irrelevance; bringing new instruments to our sound mix

offered an interesting solution (or at least, a challenge). Yet, the accordion, ukulele, or cello are no more commonplace in this music. Was I merely swapping one 'problematic' instrument for a series of them? I saw this variety as an opportunity to push our music from being one-dimensional to multi-characteristic. Moreover, I engaged in the use of different instruments in the spirit of improvisatory 'play'. While I had no serious musical aspirations for this project, it blossomed into one that yielded the most audience attention. This demonstrates how improvisation can help deal with unexpected circumstances, enhancing a musical concept. It is representative of the 'can-do' attitude that has become the basis of my practice.

I want to underline how the practice of improvisation in this context was, paradoxically, perfectly deliberate. That is, I did not play multiple instruments for the sake of playing multiple instruments – that would be pretentious, or in Bryars' word, a 'sham'. Rather, I chose not to play the violin all the time and instead to employ an instrument that would add musical value to each song. In this, I learnt from the example of Wayne Shorter, in a 2012 performance at Birmingham Town Hall. Shorter was holding the tenor saxophone and about to join his ensemble; he then decided otherwise, putting down the tenor and picking up his soprano saxophone instead. This simple act of selecting the 'right instrument' for the 'right moment' speaks volumes about improvisational practice. The improvisation is not just between self and the collective but also within self – making choices between available options, starting with the fundamental matter of which instrument to play. The ability to play multiple instruments is not a luxury or a gimmick: it is an added responsibility to oneself and to the music. I would have been cheating myself of better music-making had I decided not to utilize other instruments in the band, especially where I possess sufficient

skill. It is a responsibility that has to be exercised with an appropriate balance between adventurous improvisation and instrumental skill.

As I navigated between different instruments, I tried to be guided by my inner musicality. Since I am not formally trained in the accordion, electric bass, or ukulele, I played them in my own functional way repurposing my skills on other instruments. The other band members rarely suggested specific ideas, leaving me to 'be creative' (i.e. figure my part out), then opining whether they liked it or not. We did not follow any formal model for such work, and my own practice was very much self-led and thoroughly improvised. It was nonetheless a successful process, which was enjoyed by the band and by our listeners. In a sense, this practice enacts the idea that the jazz musician is a conduit of music rather than a highly trained musician, which has been discussed extensively in jazz scholarship (Kofsky, 1970; Heble, 2000; Porter, 2002). Such a perception can be seen as a liability rather than an advantage, or in the words of Tracey Nicholls, 'the most toxic stereotype' (2017:228).

I am coming to terms with this condition, however, which articulates a difference between my practice as a jazz and (still) a classical musician. I experience the dichotomy between classical and jazz identities first hand each time I perform. I never know how to introduce myself when people ask me what I do or study. Playing multiple instruments less than expertly has diluted my musical identity further, or perhaps, mixed a slightly volatile cocktail. It is harder to validate my position since I do not belong to any one community: classical or jazz, Asian or Western, violinist or multi-instrumentalist. Each time I perform, I relearn how to represent myself to others, depending on the context, while also grappling with how I am perceived by others. As always, representing myself in performance is a musically driven prospect with socially divergent repercussions.

Portfolio: Recordings – The Goodenough Band 'Between Here and Now'

### 5.3a Cadence: Belonging

The issues that I am circling are those of community and belonging. As I reflect on my practice in The Goodenough Band, I question the motivations of my actions. What is the point of it all, really? Certainly, it is not to play as many instruments and styles as possible, though it is nice to be recognized as versatile. But it requires great dedication to learn an instrument well and it is difficult to be viewed as a 'serious' musician when one dabbles with other instruments inexpertly. There are as many drawbacks as benefits because no one can perfect such a range of skills. Performance standards are hard to gauge as well because 'expert/good/enjoyable' is a matter of relative perspective. My practice may send out mixed messages to listeners about talent and creativity. My non-musician friends find it fascinating that I can play different styles and instruments, but their understanding of my creative choices does not go much further than that. My musician friends are more cautious (sometimes even caustic), perhaps because they do not see pop-folk as 'serious' music, worthy of creative analysis. When they tease me about being able to 'play everything', I tend to feel sheepish by my dilettantism rather than validated for my creative choices. Yet, I cannot discuss these frankly with my peers without seeming ostentatious or pretentious. While I may have brought this social checkmate upon myself, not to have tried out a range of options in the context of The Goodenough Band would have been to betray my creative spirit. Surely a conversation about creative choices should revolve around the music and not the means. In other words, if I am asked 'what instruments can you play?' instead of 'why do you play them?', engagement with my creative process remains at a superficial level.

In terms of artistic research, it is less interesting to answer 'what' and 'how' questions, however useful they may be in providing contextual information. It is more important to answer 'why' questions as these help to locate one's research position while

testing the value of creative propositions. In essence, my use of multi-instrumentality has to be creatively engaging and musically satisfying as part of my practice. It is creatively engaging for me to perform different styles and to use different instruments because I am above all a musician – it is in my nature as much as it is in my training. However, the greater satisfaction for me is in making music together, despite the socio-musical challenges that I perceive myself to have. I want to belong to my community in a meaningful and enriching way. But then, how do I define my community? Vijay Iyer quotes Cara Wong from her book *Boundaries of Obligation* (2010), in which she describes community as 'an image in the mind of an individual, of a group toward whose members s/he feels a sense of similarity, belonging, and fellowship' (2014). In other words, it is an individually imagined concept which changes across time and space. Thus, it is not for others to create this communal sense for me, as much as my peers and I practice conscientiousness or 'musicianship' with respect to one other in the Goodenough Band, or in any other ensemble. How much others accommodate me is determined in equal measure by how much I adapt to them in my practice. That is, the process requires me to make myself essential to the creative work as much as it requires others to recognize me as essential to the collective creative work. As is the general opinion of jazz violinists I have spoken to, no one is to blame for not choosing to work with a jazz violinist, but we should take creative steps to be relevant to the community and to invite people into our sound.

So, what are the characteristics of a community that possesses a sense of 'similarity, belonging, and fellowship'? Is 'belonging' a condition that is truly achievable? How am I 'belonging' in The Goodenough Band, for example, if I am constantly left to my own devices, to forge my own way into the music? Then again, facing suggestions at every juncture of my music-making process would not indicate 'belonging' either. The differences between each

of us in the band are so great that our shared values in our imagined community (our band) will be as much about our dissimilarities as our similarities. Is it not more realistic, then, to speak of belonging in terms of existing together despite our differences? That is, in the true spirit of fellowship, we are committed to an ideal and obliged to serve each other for the continuity and benefit of the community. bell hooks offers the opinion that community is formed not by eradicating difference but by affirming all identities and cultural legacies that shape us and how we live in the world (1995b:265). Again, I cannot speak for my band members and what they imagine our community is in terms of 'similarity, belonging, and fellowship'. It may be the case that they feel just as isolated in their musical practice as I do – or that they are absolutely nonchalant, as the band has no direct implications on their musical careers or research outcomes.

The Goodenough Band is different to my other musical projects as it arose organically, out of our shared interest in playing together. My other ensembles have been established with more specific motivations and conditions. Furthermore, I lead those ensembles, and thus (in relation to my research work) am able to influence the conditions of my creative process to a certain degree. If I retain a sense of unbelonging in those projects, it pre-existed them and I am participating to advance my investigations of it. By contrast, The Goodenough Band is one where my unbelonging has emerged from within the activity and has usefully provided new critical scope for my research. Through it, I continue to investigate how the violin is able to participate in other styles, utilizing my jazz training in improvisation, and discovering new social perspectives derived from my creative practice. The crucial difference is that the ensemble is a shared creative project with no one member taking ownership of it. We agree (and disagree) collectively on what repertoire we want to do, how we structure our rehearsals, if we want to perform, taking each other's preferences

and opinions into consideration. The band was not established for the sake of investigating a research question. In this way, I find, somewhat surprisingly, that the Goodenough Band best fits the 'practice-as-research' conditions that I set out and gives a complementary perspective to my other projects – one that is more fitting than if I had sought to make it so.

Here, some gnawing thoughts linger about belonging – ones that are related to my initial discussions of creativity and authenticity. These two qualities intersect in artistic work, but they diverge in assessment of the music and musician. That is, if creativity is about 'what' (music), authenticity is about 'who' (musician); and to an extent, if authenticity is about 'belonging', creativity is about 'unbelonging'. Both creativity and authenticity figure in many of my examples, but it can be difficult to tell one from the other as the process is about the musician (belonging-authentically) as much as it is about the music (unbelonging-creatively). As I found in my assessment of improvisation, creative expectations tend to override musical instincts leading to disappointing 'shams' of both music and musicianship. Thus, good musicianship must accommodate the paradox of creativity and authenticity – and I believe that our 'goodenough' band fulfilled this paradox.

## 5.4 Coda: No Further Noise

I want to complete this chapter with a project that is too brief to be considered a case study but is perhaps the most true to my 'Self/ves'. It ties together elements of free improvisation, jazz, and belonging – the very elements that I discuss in my three case studies. In the summer of 2018, I spent a week in Leipzig with the intention of visiting my friend Philipp Martin, a bassist.[29] For years, we had planned to catch up with each other. Now, with me

[29] Philipp Martin, from Weimar, was an Erasmus exchange student at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire for one semester during my postgraduate course. An electric bassist, he was one of the first musicians I played with in the pre-TriYeoh days, which opened me to the possibility of playing without a chordal instrument.

being in London, a visit was possible and we planned to incorporate several gigs into it, too. When we were both students, Philipp and I had bonded over our mutual love for the cello (he is a former cellist) and John Mayer (the Grammy awarding singer-songwriter, not the Indo-Fusion composer). Also, the fact that we were both relative outsiders, him an exchange student and me an international student (and violinist), meant that we found each other through social circumstances.

We also had alternative backgrounds to most of the jazz students at our institution. Philipp credits his entrance to jazz to an avant-garde, post-GDR sensibility. I cannot articulate what it is exactly that drew me to his playing. He is technical, imaginative, sensitive, rhythmic, diverse, and musical – like but unlike any other jazz bassists I have encountered – and his work is diverse, ranging from pop and funk through improvisation to avant-garde and electronic musics. He was a composition major in his postgraduate studies and I always felt that gave him an edge in articulating his musical self. Catching up with him again, he had expanded his musical omnivorism and had such a holistic understanding of music that I could only wonder why he wanted to play with me at all. We did not make any plans about what songs to play, both of us too busy to think that far ahead. It was to be decided on the day of the first gig, during a short rehearsal – the proper jazz way then.

We played two gigs with Philipp's colleagues, Jonas Dorn (guitar) and Clemens Litschko (drums) after one rehearsal (Portfolio: Link 4). Not only had I not played with any of them before, but they were not a regular ensemble either (though they had all played together on the Leipzig scene). In other words, the situation was akin to my first case study, in which the musicians knew of each other but mostly did not play together regularly. However, everyone in the Leipzig quartet came from a jazz background and had since expanded from it – which parallels my second case study. In no way was this performance

crafted specifically to fit the violin, yet the violin was easily made relevant to the music. In this way, it diverges from my third case study. The sense of community that I enjoyed in Leipzig has made me rethink the characteristics of community that Cara Wong expresses as 'similarity, belonging, and fellowship' (2014). It was not just the social community that made me feel welcome, but it is the musical one, too. Finally, I did not have to prove myself in any way (musical or social) to be invited into the community. I did not have to lead a project to be 'accepted' (as in TriYeoh); I did not have to be musically quirky to gain access (like LIO); and I did not have to work around my violinistic self to participate (like The Goodenough Band). In this case, I just presented my uncompromised self – violinist, improviser, musician – and it was refreshing to be able to do just that. While I was there by token of being Philipp's friend, it had little bearing on the music-making.

This marks one of the few times I have played in a standard jazz quartet form and enjoyed the creative space. There were many variables that facilitated this (different repertoire and ensemble members, for one) but it was the intangible aspects that created the experience. I hesitate to specify what this might mean because that would be false and contradictory – just a fusion of circumstances and feelings. In any case, such an environment is not something that one could replicate as a research project. We played mostly originals by Philipp and his friends. I would describe some of the pieces that we played as incorporating free improvisation in avant-garde compositions, with intricate time signatures and shifting compositional structures. Even so, listening to the music, one might get the sense either that it was freely improvised, or that it was completely written out. Other pieces we played were more straight-ahead in style, though some had tricky compositional forms. I am reminded here of Tim Berne's challenge for jazz musicians to make improvised music sound written and written music sound improvised – which this performance came

the closest in my experience to doing. While many interesting moments were generated directly by the compositions, they unleashed effective interplay between musicians – a testament to intelligent music-writing. I have never encountered such music before in performance (perhaps only in recordings). I am aware that there could be a cultural or educational factor to this, given that I have never lived and played in Germany. But what was striking to me was that I at no point felt 'marked' by the fact that I was a violinist and that adjustments needed to be made to accommodate me.

In this performance I was able to participate as an equal – different, relevant, and even, necessary. Over time, my creative process has taken me from trying to debunk the jazz violin myth, to developing my own improvisatory language with free improvisation and the like, to finding suitable ensembles to play with, to navigating the complicated social scene. This experience has offered me an insight into what it means to be a jazz musician, not just trying to play jazz. It has been a long and meandering journey, to a place that I thought it would be impossible when I first started learning jazz.

Portfolio: Recordings – No Further Noise

# Conclusion

Arriving at the end of my research project and thesis, I reflect again on the —deliberately open-ended—question with which I began, 'why jazz?'. The lack of a more concrete research question has allowed me to pursue various creative opportunities, without worrying unduly how they might fit into my research agenda—or, rather, without allowing my research agenda to dictate my creative practice. In hindsight, this attitude is reflective of my creative journey from when I first began exploring jazz on the violin. An ostensible lack of form and structure in my learning process allowed my musicality to shape what form my jazz musicianship would take. In the same way, my purposely flexible programme of research has allowed my conclusions to emerge from my creative practice.

Asking 'what' and 'how' to play has provided practical answers to certain issues but it has not addressed the significance of having these answers. For example, I have found that learning jazz does not make one a jazz musician – at least, not in perceptions of my experience. To that extent, answering the 'what' and 'how' with my ethnographical and auto-ethnographical data was insufficient to craft an effective research project. Thus, my driving motivation became to explain *'why'.* What bridges the gap between learning jazz and being a jazz musician, or (for that matter) the gap between a practising musician and a research scholar is responding to information, looking at ways that it has shaped my practice and research. While asking 'how' was relevant in demonstrating the ways I am a jazz musician, asking 'why' shapes it into research because it establishes meaning and significance of the practice (Ellis, 2004:116).

This research has focussed on the work I do as a jazz violinist and explores the creative possibilities that are afforded me in this role. The relative novelty and limited consideration

of jazz violin has allowed for it to be tested in various contexts with significantly new outcomes. My case studies explored in more detail the tools and creative models that I described in earlier chapters. Thus, the creative work was modelled as an experiment to 'answer the research question about [the] art and practice, which could not otherwise be explored by other methods' (Skains, 2018:86). The thornier issue for me to consider is whether these issues would exist at all without my practice as a base.

My research aims and outcomes are particular to a certain context, creative environment, and set of circumstances, which I recognise could not be replicated by others (or even by me) as replication of creative work is never the end-goal. Nevertheless, these particularities have informed the way that my artistic research is structured and how meaning can be extracted from creative practice. Thus, my work may serve as a model for future research on creative practice in jazz, even if its specific conclusions seem too personal at this stage to offer practical solutions for jazz pedagogy. My work has also shed new light on how research methodologies such as blending ethnography and auto-ethnography can be utilized for artistic research in providing further clarity about the creative process. Understanding how and why a balance between methodologies can be effective for artistic research allows for a more cohesive narrative to form between musician and community, work and style. These are among the contributions of my research to studies of artistic collaboration.

In this Conclusion, I want to reflect further on the methodological issues that arose in the course of my work, discussing how best I was able to address them, and what my experience may suggest for future research on creative practice in jazz. One of the anxieties I endured in this research was how the theoretical framework of auto-ethnography may sometimes interfere with the creative practice and thus the research outcomes. The

'conflict of interest' that I discussed in the Introduction must be offset by an ethical responsibility on the behalf of the researcher not to be persuaded by any which result – significantly, a result that may be too convenient to reflect the complexity of the creative practice. How can self-appraisal be combined with scholarly independence? Are they mutually exclusive? Neil Heyde confessed in his keynote speech at 'Beyond Mesearch' (16th-17th April 2018, Institute of Musical Research) that it is difficult to distinguish between practice presented as research and work that fulfils the definition of research. The key, according to him, is to establish a clear context for the research rather than to define the research field – which is inevitably a moving target in artistic research. Although this sage advice came some time after the commencement of my fieldwork, it is heartening to note in hindsight that my approach has followed this trajectory. It was never clear to me what my 'field' would look like, except that it must involve me, somehow, in practice. But rather than agonising over the specificity of the field, I allowed myself to focus on the context of my creative practice – that is, to let my creative practice determine my research, or to let my research emerge from my creative practice. This was not always straightforward, and I still agonize over how some musical collaborations may have been shaped by my research more than my creative practice. In other words, creative practice operates with greater flexibility than can always be accommodated by a research agenda, however broadly conceived. Similarly, Heyde also asks how much artistic loss may be justified by research gain, questioning the trade-off between artistic value and research purpose. This highlights the dilemma between creative practice and research work faced by auto-ethnographers.

In another critical text, Burke and Onsman (2017:3-17) theorize what artistic research in music is and how performance is its mode of discovery. Artistic research, they claim, is the 'analysis of [a] performance as well as the process undertaken to achieve it'

(p.8). But artistic research can take different paths to create new knowledge in music and to create new music through research – and the latter is dependent on a robust research framework that accommodates 'multiple avenues of investigation and outcomes' (p.6). It must be cautioned here that creating new music is not the fundamental purpose of artistic research enquiry – at least, not in a direct sense. My research has not yielded grand epiphanies about music-making, but it has yielded new musical practices which have subsequently generated new musical works and performances. Theorizing what practice-based research in music performance can be involves understanding what experimental music-making is in principle. Such work does not resolve defined and isolated research questions, but it may create possibilities for future research, or be discarded as irrelevant, or simply exist independently on its own (Lewis, 2014). Through the process of experimental music-making, which is contingent on artistic research in music, the artistry that emerges from the creative process may be considered as research if it expands our knowledge and understanding – in other words, if the artistry 'addresses questions that characterize research' (Borgdorff, 2012).

My research questions were found in the simple enquiry 'why jazz?'. While I did not understand it at the beginning, asking 'why jazz?' has shaped my creative practice, sharpened my thoughts, and subsequently generated new works and performances. The question has reminded me continually of my need for improvisation to regenerate my creative practice and to position my work as musically satisfying (to myself, at least). In asking 'why jazz?', I have also had to consider the 'what' and 'how' of my creative practice. My personal experimentation in and interrogation of the creative process falls in line with what Moustakas considers heuristic research, encompassing 'self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery' (1990:11). Borgdorff (2012) takes it a step further by contending that, if

creative practice is essentially contingent on research, then the reverse must also be true. However, Burke and Onsman (2017:8) contend that not all production of creative work is artistic research per se – and here, other propositions arise. Indeed, if all creations were research, Grammy award winners should be given doctorates, for their artistic productions would be deemed artistic research. The key aspect in any form of research, thus, may be the research question – which directs the researcher to use the appropriate methodology, leads to the generation of relevant data, and thus begins to answer the question. As Burke and Onsman (2017:8) put it: 'An artistic performance without a research question may simply exist as art, rather than as artistic research'. But, is artistic research as simple as framing, or even validating, creative practice with a research question? What about Borgdorff's reverse proposition that research is contingent on creative practice?

The answer may depend on *where* one begins on the continuum of artistic research. If we assume that creative work has research merit only when it is framed by a research question, we are starting with research, devising practices that will yield creative outcomes. As the research develops, the process of research and the field of enquiry (fieldwork) merge in practice-based research (as highlighted also by Heyde). Hence, Borgdorff's reverse proposition may make sense as well: to start with creative practice and draw out a research objective. Even so, these fluid lines between research work and creative practice are not the most problematic part of artistic research – that is auto-ethnography. The issue here is how much the research is able to accommodate subjectivity and reflection as legitimate forms of analysis. The advantages of reflective research are compelling, according to Carole Gray and Julian Malins, who consider that 'insider' knowledge, experience and status lend credibility and validity to research. Furthermore, research conducted by a reflective practitioner acknowledges the 'complexity, dynamism, and unpredictability of the real world' (2004:23).

However, these characteristics, which are part of the nature of research, are compounded when the subject matter also concerns 'complexity, dynamism, and unpredictability' – specifically, improvisation, which encompasses all these characteristics. Such volatility on all fronts, research and musical, can be discouraging, making it hard to judge whether the research is tilting off-course, or the creative practice is – and to what extent they should be.

The big question (for me, at least) is *when*, in the imagined practice-research continuum, auto-ethnography should enter the fray. At what point does it help to clarify the research framework? Again, there are no simple answers. Reflexive research is a relatively new mode of enquiry, and necessarily a highly personal one. This resulting lack of replicability is in the nature of reflexive research, because the knowledge gained is negotiable and negotiated. It is 'inter-subjective, context-bound, and is a result of personal construction' (Gray & Malins, 2004:21). However, because of this lack of replicability, it must all the more be able to withstand academic critique and be clearly articulated for public accessibility. Unlike scientific research, which builds on previous scholarship to develop understanding, the results of artistic research (i.e. the creative work) cannot be remade or directly extended by another researcher. Indeed, I cannot imagine another project exactly like mine, conducting the same investigation of jazz violin. For now, it seems that the next logical step that could build on my discussion of 'why jazz?' would perhaps be 'why Pei?'. It might start by disputing my claims and replacing my practices with other approaches that may do more to advance jazz violin practice. Another problem with the artistic research framework is that the flexibility of approach allows for multiple starting points of enquiry – as expressed by what I have called the practice-research continuum.

What emerges from my research is a composite investigation that was formulated as part of the process. That is, I use a combination of personal reflections and collective

perspectives to make sense of the creative outputs as scholarship. Both perspectives are necessary as there are some perspectives that cannot be articulated by another. Each musician, particularly when improvising, takes their own approach. Furthermore, since the practice of jazz violin is marginalized, each player I have met has had a different point of entry into the study of jazz – and that in itself validates the use of auto-ethnography since my background and practice is unique. On the other hand, a collective perspective is sometimes difficult to experience personally. For example, when analysing gendered practices in music, I considered (but could not answer) the question asked by the Feminist Improvising Group: 'What gets lost when a woman and her music are studied in the company of men; and what is recuperated when a woman joins the company of women?' (Mockus, 1999:52). With auto-ethnography in mind, an all-female ensemble would be problematic because it would exaggerate or even remove the conditions of my creative practice, however natural it might be to design such an experiment for the sake of research. Thus, the conflicting motivations of research work and creative practice may blur the lines between the two.

Finally, self-censorship is an aspect of reflective writing that I've wrestled with throughout. With auto-ethnography, self-reflexivity is necessary to articulate a genuine reaction to my practice. It has been vital that I articulate honest – and naturally, therefore, biased – opinions of my creative process. I have to back myself and my creative practice, even if nobody else agrees with my choices. But this creates a struggle between self-definition and self-justification that Heyde (2018) says characterizes the work of all ethnographers. Are there deliberate attempts to be critical, or is this an elaborate narcissistic scheme? In a broader sense, artistic researchers are attempting to institutionalize creativity – which sounds like an oxymoron.

The problem of evaluating performances that are beyond traditional practice and, to an extent, of evaluating a diverse portfolio of practices, is the ambiguity of criteria and the lack of institutionalized standards. But this research shows that it can push creative boundaries while managing circumstantial constitutions. In looking towards future research and creative practice, the use of improvisation as a tool of negotiation and belonging is one that I am interested to pursue. My research has shown how improvisation is useful in developing new relationships and how new identities can emerge from collaborative creative practices. These identities need not be directly related to jazz studies, or to the violin for that matter. Instead, I am using jazz as a theme to energise the discussion relating to cross-cultural creative work. More immediately, I am keen to work out a Malaysian music identity in which traditional music practices can connect with my jazz identity, using improvisation as a tool to push the potential outcome beyond traditional practice. My experience of the jazz practice in various parts of the world will assist me in exploring new musical boundaries and engage with the discourse about jazz and fusion music. This will hopefully translate to future engagement with other musical traditions, using my understanding of artistic research to validate the necessary approaches in developing both the research and creative work. Through this, I hope to build a sustainable creative practice, regenerating new musical forms and identities through improvisation.

For now, I must consider the scope of work that I have achieved through artistic research. Perhaps artistic research is about balancing sustained contradictions. Perhaps it is really about community-belonging. Perhaps, in contesting the dominions between musician or researcher, we will find that creative practice is a site of collaboration and imagination, while research provides a site for critical examination of theoretical disputes and possibilities. Perhaps, in between the theories and practices of ‘why jazz?’, we will be able

to construct a ‘porous, flexible, strategic, and liberatory’ (Tucker, 2004:250) ideal of becoming.

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# Portfolio

## Timeline of Projects and Research Activity

Year 1 (2015-2016)

- November 2015 – TriYeoh project (re)commence

Year 2 (2016-2017)

- November 2016 – Start of JP Muir collaboration
- January 2017 – Goodenough Band project established
- February 2017 – Start of London Improviser's Orchestra association
- 16th May 2017 – TriYeoh at The Lamp Tavern, Birmingham
- July 2017 – Fieldwork with Anthony Barnett, jazz violin researcher, publisher, and archivist. Subsequent publishing of my music in Snow Lit Rev (Spring 2018), Allardyce Barnett, ISSN: 2052-1685; ISBN: 978-0-907054-56-9
- 14-18th August 2017 – Seifert Jazz Violin Workshop, Poland

Year 3 (2017-2018)

- 15-20th October 2017 – Bloomsbury Festival
- 3rd December 2017 – Veryan Weston and Bei Bei Wang collaboration, Warsaw Improvisation Festival, Poland
- 11th March 2018 – WOW Orchestra, Southbank Centre
- 22nd March 2018 – TriYeoh gig at Claptrap The Venue, Stourbridge
- April 2018 – (15th April) Mopomoso monthly gig at The Vortex, London; (16th April) Mopomoso workshop at Sevilla Mia, London
- 28th April 2018 – TriYeoh recording (Released on March 2019, *FMR Records*, CD525-1218)
- 31st May 2018 – JP Muir and Pei Ann Yeoh at Hampstead Jazz Club; live recording
- June 2018 – Goodenough Band recording (Independent release, Goodenough College)
- July 2018 – Various collaborations with Philipp Martin in Leipzig; live recording
- 6th August 2018 – Veryan Weston and Bei Bei Wang at The Vortex, London; live recording (Released on 3rd June 2019, *Fundacja Sluchaj!* FSR07-2019)

## Audio

Audio 1: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/donna-lee-by-charlie-parker/s-6Dd47

Recorded: 13th July 2017, JP-Pei Duo at 49 Great Ormond Street. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded and mixed: Bobby Williams.

Audio 2: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/mopomoso-solo/s-LiNoQ

Recorded: 16th April 2018. Mopomoso workshop at Sevilla Mia, London. Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Sebastian Sterkowicz. Used with permission.

Audio 3a: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/pei-ann-yeoh-mopomoso-1/s-eDfe4

Recorded: 16th April 2018. Mopomoso workshop at Sevilla Mia, London. Deborah Chinn – baby saxophone, Chris Hill – tenor saxophone, Dave Fowler – drums, Alec Kronacker – electric guitar, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Alec Kronacker. Used with permission.

Audio 3b: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/pei-ann-yeoh-mopomoso-2/s-TaCMt

Recorded: 16th April 2018. Mopomoso workshop at Sevilla Mia, London. Martin Vishnick – acoustic guitar, Adam Kinsey – electronics, John Eyles – alto saxophone, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Alec Kronacker. Used with permission.

Audio 3c: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/pei-ann-yeoh-mopomoso-3/s-AxdHB

Recorded: 16th April 2018. Mopomoso workshop at Sevilla Mia, London. Stephan Barratt – clarinet, Sebastian Sterkowicz – bass clarinet, Emmanuelle – voice and clay whistle, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Alec Kronacker. Used with permission.

Audio 4: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/lio-5-feb-2017-guilherme-peluci/s-CrYoj

Recorded: 5th February 2017 at IKLECTIK, London. Recorded and mixed: Jeff Ardon, St. Austral Sound. Used with permission.

Audio 5: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/lio-5-feb-2017-free-improvisation/s-40GJv

Recorded: 5th February 2017 at IKLECTIK, London. Recorded and mixed: Jeff Ardon, St. Austral Sound. Used with permission.

Audio 6: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/lio-6-august-2017-pei-and-neil-intro/s-meXaV

Recorded: 6th August 2017 at IKLECTIK, London. Recorded and mixed: Jeff Ardon, St. Austral Sound. Used with permission.

Audio 7: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/llama-klezmallah-excerpt/s-0ieSv

Recorded: 27th April 2018 at Birmingham (private studio). Jim Bashford – drums, Ash Trigg – electric bass, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded and mixed: Luke Morrish-Thomas. Full track on album 'Futile', released on FMR Records (https://www.subradar.no/album/triyeoh/futile)

Audio 8: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/unspoken-thoughts-excerpt/s-TIcJl

Recorded: 27th April 2018 at Birmingham (private studio). Jim Bashford – drums, Ash Trigg – electric bass, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded and mixed: Luke Morrish-Thomas. Full track on album 'Futile', released on FMR Records (https://www.subradar.no/album/triyeoh/futile)

Audio 9: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/unspoken-thoughts-jp-pei/s-JALF3

Recorded: 31st May 2018 at Goodenough College. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

Audio 10: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/sometime-brigitte-beraha/s-kOYk6

Recorded: 31st May 2018 at Goodenough College. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

Audio 11: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/ezkadi-excerpt/s-ZzF5x

Recorded: 27th April 2018 at Birmingham (private studio). Jim Bashford – drums, Ash Trigg – electric bass, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded and mixed: Luke Morrish-Thomas. Full track on album 'Futile', released on FMR Records (https://www.subradar.no/album/triyeoh/futile)

Audio 12: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/fragile-sting/s-kBAes

Recorded: 31st May 2018 at Goodenough College. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

Audio 13: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/blackbird-the-beatles/s-qvOCY

Recorded: 31st May 2018 at Goodenough College. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

## Videos

Video 1a: Veryan Weston Trio (Part 1) - https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Gle3b-rSEjDJSdPCs6n0nSlmA4D5gne2

Recorded: 3rd December 2017 at Polskie Radio, Warsaw. Verysan Weston – piano, Bei Bei Wang – percussion, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Agata Wolska, Fundacja Arte. Used with permission.

Video 1b: Veryan Weston Trio (Part 2) - https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Vm3HjFWL9ANVIsCpeKQDvwI_G0jIonsZ

Recorded: 3rd December 2017 at Polskie Radio, Warsaw. Verysan Weston – piano, Bei Bei Wang – percussion, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Agata Wolska, Fundacja Arte. Used with permission.

Video 1c: Veryan Weston Trio (Part 3) - https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BPdmKLTyFJdVo8QuI1Nja20LR-RRrYmM

Recorded: 3rd December 2017 at Polskie Radio, Warsaw. Verysan Weston – piano, Bei Bei Wang – percussion, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Agata Wolska, Fundacja Arte. Used with permission.

Video 1d: Veryan Weston Trio (Part 4) - https://drive.google.com/open?id=1QLT8fEC133eYvsPXEr1IZS5-PDxbRBVr

Recorded: 3rd December 2017 at Polskie Radio, Warsaw. Verysan Weston – piano, Bei Bei Wang – percussion, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded: Agata Wolska, Fundacja Arte. Used with permission.

Video 2a: The Goodenough Band – I Can't Help It (Michael Jackson): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YLW-Z0f-gHsM3LyAktm3xY52jycGhxEL/view?usp=sharing

Recorded: July 2017 at Goodenough College. Emanuel Heitz – acoustic guitar, Marc-Olivier Turgeon – voice, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

Video 2b: The Goodenough Band – Starlight (Emanuel Heitz): https://drive.google.com/open?id=1QkEkKvlWCPcnXK6oQVGtHrG_NfGag74c

Recorded: June 2017 at Goodenough College. Emanuel Heitz – electric guitar, Marc-Olivier Turgeon – acoustic guitar and voice, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin and voice. Personal recording.

Video 2c: The Goodenough Band – Ode To A Friend (Emanuel Heitz):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1lysb-9X-sYS7o3LWumPlKn5rNxt5RB64

Recorded: March 2018 at Goodenough College. Emanuel Heitz – electric guitar and voice, Marc-Olivier Turgeon – acoustic guitar and voice, Pei Ann Yeoh – electric bass and voice. Personal recording.

Video 2d: The Goodenough Band – Not Dark Yet (Bob Dylan):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1PqIwqp1Is-DI1yGEE-UL8SLdtTxWSFH-

Recorded: March 2017 at Goodenough College. Emanuel Heitz – electric guitar and voice, Marc-Olivier Turgeon – acoustic guitar and voice, Pei Ann Yeoh – electric bass and voice. Personal recording.

## Links

Link 1: Chris Potter Tentet, Cheltenham Festival

(a) http://www.londonjazznews.com/2012/05/review-chris-potter-ensemble-at.html

(b) https://jazztimes.com/reviews/concerts/chris-potter-at-the-cheltenham-jazz-festival-5512/

Link 2: Dave Holland, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

https://thejazzbreakfast.wordpress.com/2010/03/10/concert-review-dave-holland-presents-2/

Link 3: Veryan Weston Trio, *As You Hear,* http://jazz.jazzarium.pl/kalendarz/festiwal-improwizacje-veryan-weston-trio

Link 4: No Further Noise XV - https://www.facebook.com/events/2056934134560762/

## Figures

Figure 1: Vortex blurb (6th August 2018)

# VERYAN WESTON'S : AS YOU HEAR

MON 06 AUGUST 2018, 8PM BOOK ONLINE

£10

Pei AnnYeoh – violin
Veryan Weston – piano
Bei Bei Wang – percussion

Malaysian violinist – Pei AnnYeoh, pianist – Veryan Weston and multi-percussionist – Bei Bei Wang meet to perform contemporary improvisations reflecting their broad cultural origins.

Figure 2: WOW Orchestra (10th-11th March 2018)

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

23 July 2018

This letter is to certify that Pei Ann Yeoh was a member of Southbank Centre's Women of the World Orchestra 2018 and played in the position of Second Violin for a performance called *Mirth Control - Arts Over Tit*, on Sunday 11th March 2018 in the Royal Festival Hall.

*Mirth Control* was the finale of Southbank Centre's Women of the World Festival and was an evening of music, comedy and activism presented by comedienne Sandi Toksvig. The orchestra comprising music students, recent graduates and gifted amateur musicians, were recruited especially for this performance and mentored by professional section leaders. They performed a number of classical and popular pieces conducted by Alice Farnham with guest artists Josette Bushell-Mingo, Alice Russell and Zara McFarlane with a 200-strong all female Voicelab choir.

The orchestra rehearsed intensively on Saturday 10th & Sunday 11th March before the concert.

The full repertoire was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Joan Tower: | *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman, No. 1* |
| Ethel Smyth: | *Serenade in D Major, movement II, Scherzo* |
| Four Non-Blondes: | *What's Up?* |
| Richard Wagner: | *Ride of the Valkyries* (Featuring RPS women conductors) |
| Nina Simone: | *Mississippi Goddam* |
| Nina Simone: | *Revolution* |
| Zara McFarlane: | *Love* |
| Elisabeth Lutyens: | *En Voyage Suite for Full Orchestra, movement I, Overture* |
| Aretha Franklin: | *Respect* |

Southbank Centre would like to congratulate and thank Pei for her amazing contribution to the WOW Orchestra and Mirth Control 2018.

With many thanks,

**Dr Sophie Ransby**
**Education Manager (Orchestras)**

Figure 3: TriYeoh at Claptrap The Venue (22nd March 2018)

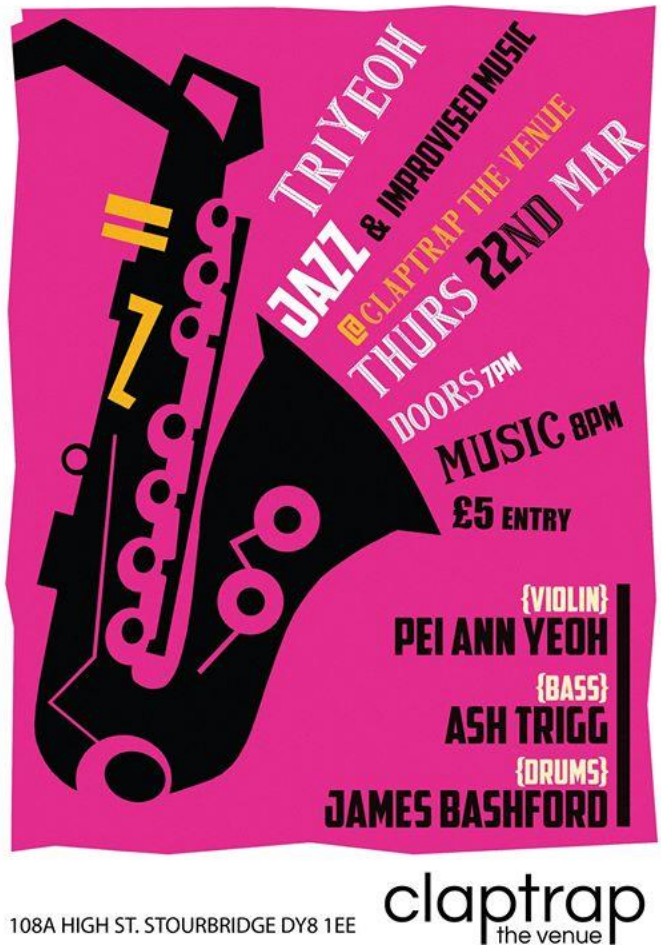


Figure 4: Bloomsbury Festival 2017


13 August 2018

This letter is to certify that Pei Ann Yeoh participated in the 2017 Bloomsbury Festival in a number of events.

She played violin in the house band at our Friday evening str eet party - Sing Out Store Street on October 20th 2017 at the main stage on Stor e St.

She also played violin in the ensemble as part of Bloomsbury Songs, with multiple performances across the festival. Please see the br ochure attached with further details.

We would like to thank Pei for her outstanding contribution to the 2017 festival acr oss a number of different events, which is a tribute to her musicianship, versatility and pr ofessionalism.

With best wishes,

John-Paul Muir

**Senior Programme Manager**
**Bloomsbury Festival**

*A Bloomsbury Festival Production*

BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL
18-22 OCTOBER 2017

# Bloomsbury Songs

Bloomsbury Songs is a dynamic pop-up song cycle inspired by life in Bloomsbury.

The project has brought together local choirs and acclaimed creative team, composer Michael Henry and theatre-maker Emma Bernard in a collaboration to create five new songs, which will be performed today and in-part throughout the Festival.

Each song explores aspects of Bloomsbury life, from a child's delight in the right to play (*A Song for Coram's Fields*) to the elders fox-trotting through someone else's busy day (*We Are Here*).

## PERFORMANCES

Wednesday 18 October, 4.30pm & 6pm at Pancras Square, King's Cross
**Argyle School Choir - *A Song for Coram's Field***
**Westminster Kingsway College - *Gray's Inn Sing***
**Kings Place Community Choir - *Sing Out***

Thursday 19 October, 4.30pm & 6.30pm at Coram's Fields
**Argyle School Choir - *A Song for Coram's Field***
**Westminster Kingsway College - *Gray's Inn Sing***
**Great Ormond Street Hospital Staff and Parent Choir - *In The Night***
**The Mary Ward Chorus - *We Are Here***

Friday 20 October, 6.30pm, 7.30pm & 8.30pm at *Sing Out Store Street!*
**All singing our anthem - *Sing Out:* Sound Choir, The Bloomsburys, Westminster Kingsway College**
**Great Ormond Street Staff and Parent Choir, The Mary Ward Chorus, Kings Place Community Choir**

## CREATIVE TEAM

**Emma Bernard -** Director and Lyricist
Recent projects: Hearing Voices, Drawing Life (both by Jocelyn Pook), The Roadless Trip (Sarah Woods), Brainsong ( Anna Braithwaite), The Honey Man (Tyrone Huggins) and the Chinese premiere of Benjamin Britten's Peter Grimes for Beijing Music Festival. She regularly collaborates with composer Orlando Gough, and has directed four major productions for Streetwise Opera. Other work includes: Upon This Rock, (composer Jonathan Baker) Metal, Peterborough, 100% Norfolk, Norwich Theatre Royal. Emma has lived in and around Bloomsbury for over 20 years. www.emmabernard.co.uk

**Michael Henry -** Composer & Musical Director
Recent projects: as Musical Director, Barber Shop Chronicles (National Theatre 2017), They Drink It In The Congo (Almeida Theatre 2016), May Contain Food (Protein Dance 2015-16), Boi Boi Is Dead (West Yorkshire Playhouse 2015), Mr. Burns (Almeida Theatre 2014). As composer: Barber Shop Chronicles, Mr. Burns and Boi Boi Is Dead, the opera Circus Tricks in 2012, the Rocket Symphony for 500 voices and fireworks for Linz: European Capital of Culture 2009, and Stand for 16 voices (BBC PROMS 2006). Michael has provided live backing vocals for George Michael, Chaka Khan, Will Young and The Pet Shop Boys amongst others.

**Hannah Sharkey -** Producer

**Bloomsbury Songs Band:**
**George Ellis -** Tuba
**Beth Higham-Edwards -** Kajon
**Ben de Souza -** Accordion
**Pei Ann Yeoh -** Violin
**Melanie Pappenheim -** singer
**Donna Lennard -**singer

We would like to thank the following for their support with the project: Sheena Masson, Naomi Hammerton, Shelley Wilson, Stac Dowdeswell, Annette Pryce, Maddy Fisk, Caroline Moore, Ged Matthews, Coram's Field, Argent, Senate House, UCL and NBC.

Figure 5: Snow Lit Rev 6 publication

SNOW *lit rev*
Allardyce Book Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers
14 Mount Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1HL UK
www.abar.net | ab@abar.net
*Distributed in USA by SPD Berkeley CA www.spdbooks.org*



All issues errata, info at www.abar.net/snow.pdf
Settled in Centaur MT with a small amount of Japanese in
YuMincho, a tiny amount of Korean in GungSeo, and a small
amount of Greek in after-Centaur Coelacanth by AB©omposer
Printed by CPI ARowe EUK Arctic Vol paper Ice White cover
Snogo by Fiona Allardyce

6, SPRING SNOW 2018



*A·B*

ICESNOW ISSNOW ISSN 2052-1685
OCCASIONAL 6 ISBN 978-0-907954-56-9

# PEI ANN YEOH

## Miniatures (*for* M)

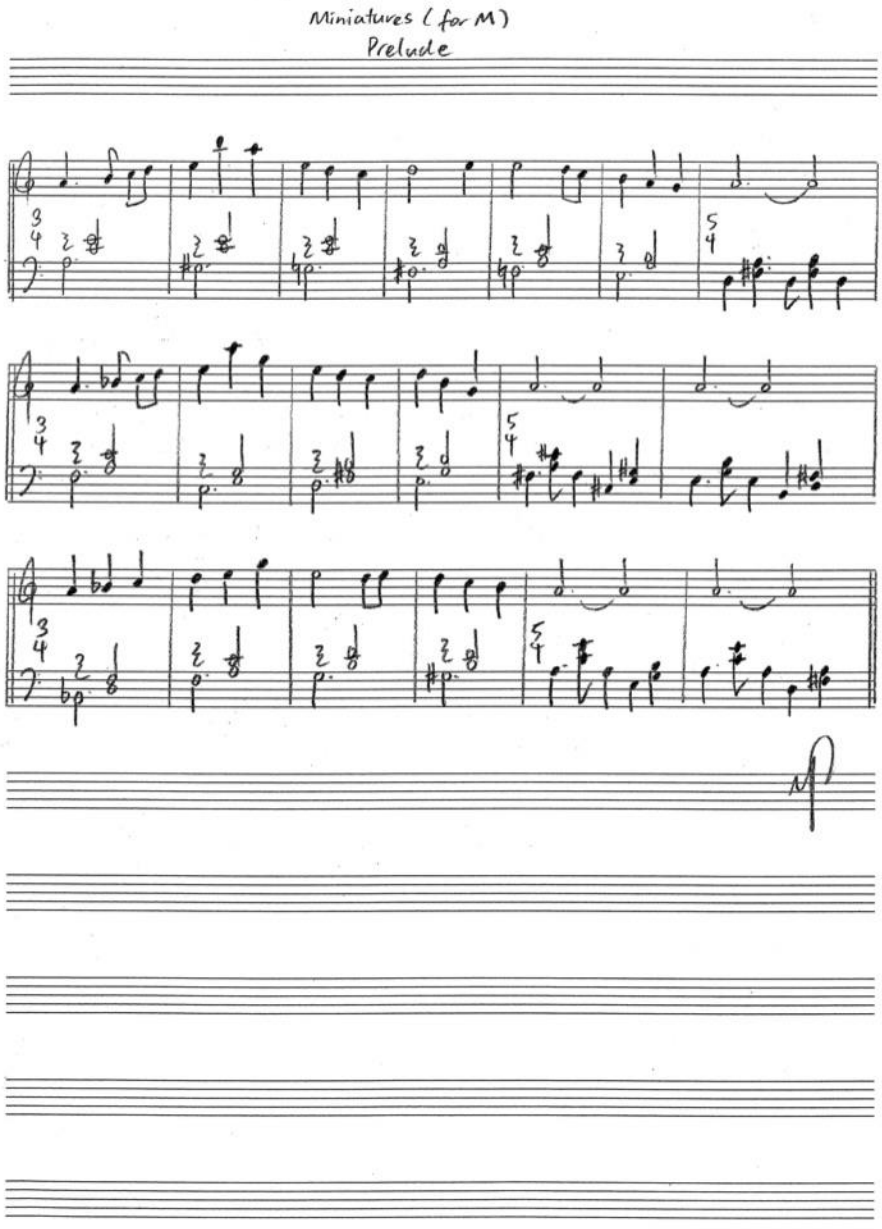
In the spring of 2017, I wrote a short piece for M—with the intention of composing a suite based on that theme. I wrote it in simplified piano score so he could learn to play it for his "recreational amateur" level (as he frames it!) The suite never came about as other facets of life came crowding in. Instead, I began composing short pieces—miniatures, in the spirit of the first one I wrote, which became *Prelude*.

Over two days, in the height of summertime at a Scottish retreat, I churned out miniature after miniature until I feared that was going to be the only way I would ever write music again.

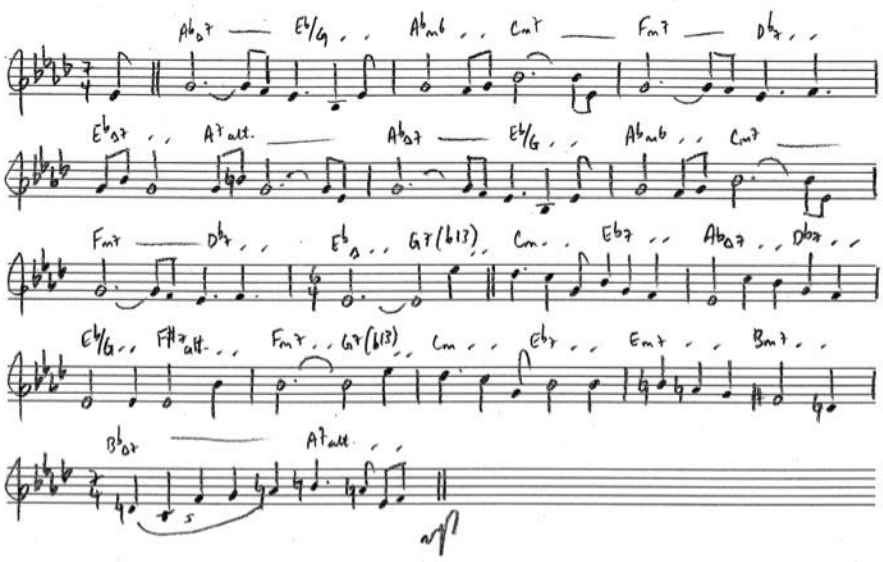
In writing for *Snow*, I decided to use some of these miniatures and craft them into suitable notation for the hobbyist piano player. They are not terribly difficult pieces, nor should they be played to score. It is merely my imagination of it for the piano. Their first form is in leadsheet and I have provided that version too. I consider each miniature to be whole and complete—and indeed, standalone pieces, detached from their grouping or order. The double bars here do not indicate formal endings, so I leave them to your playful discretion.

Just like any child born and delivered as they are, these miniatures will now take on a life that is of their own making with you—from me, but beyond me.

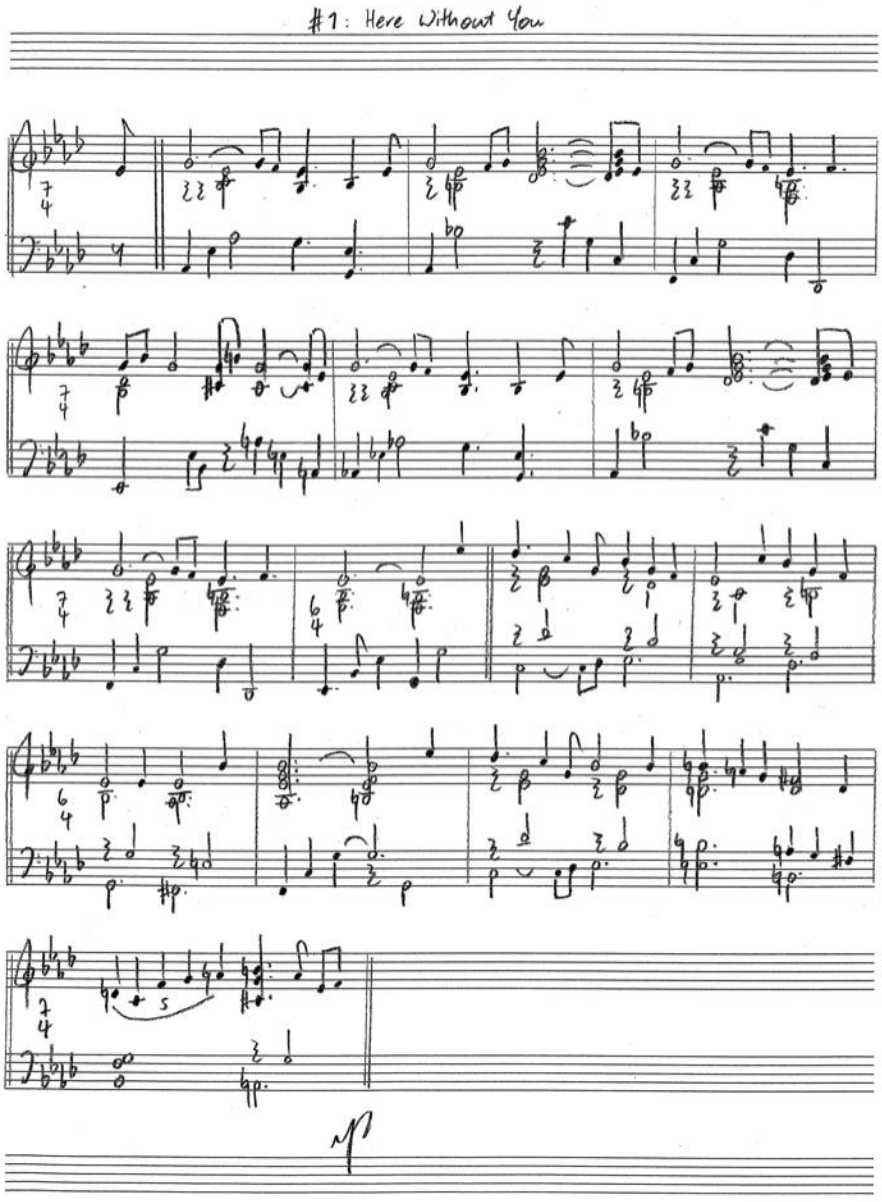
*January 2018*


Miniatures (for M)
Prelude

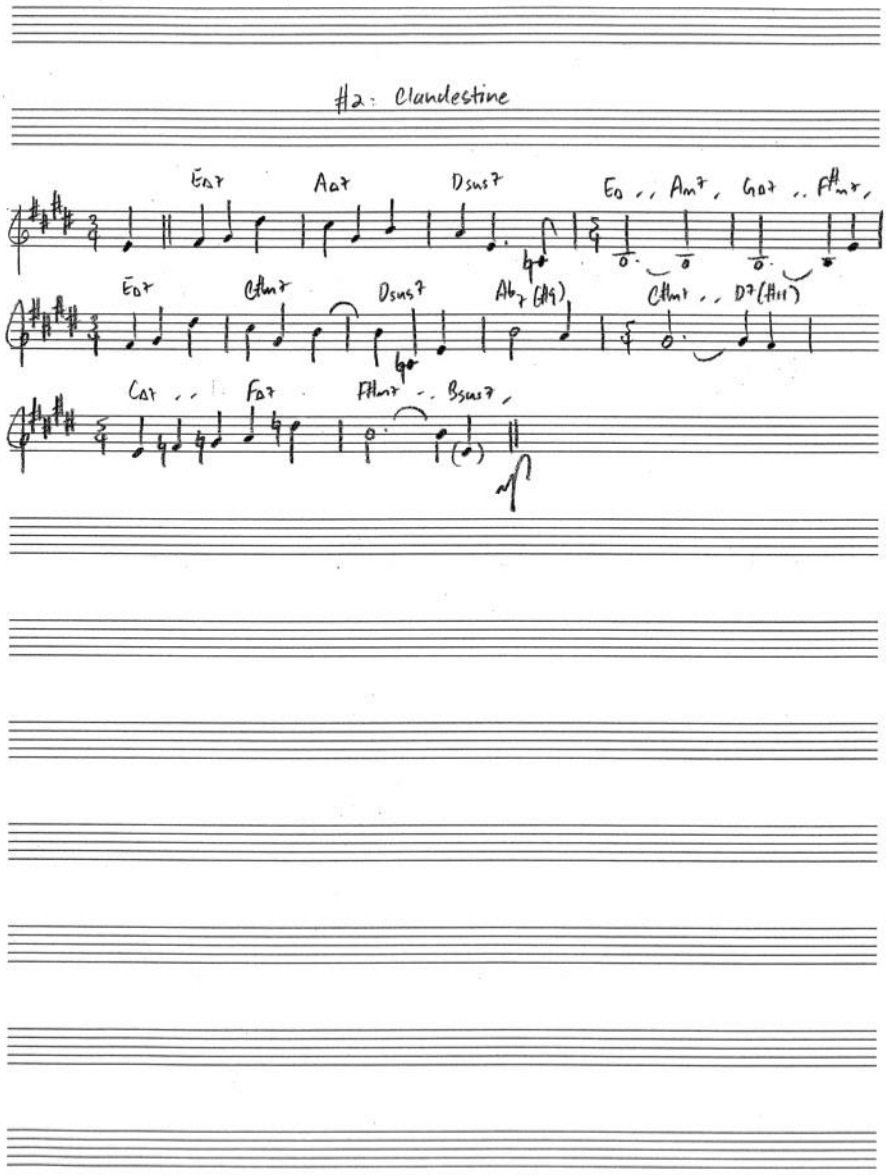
#1: Here without You

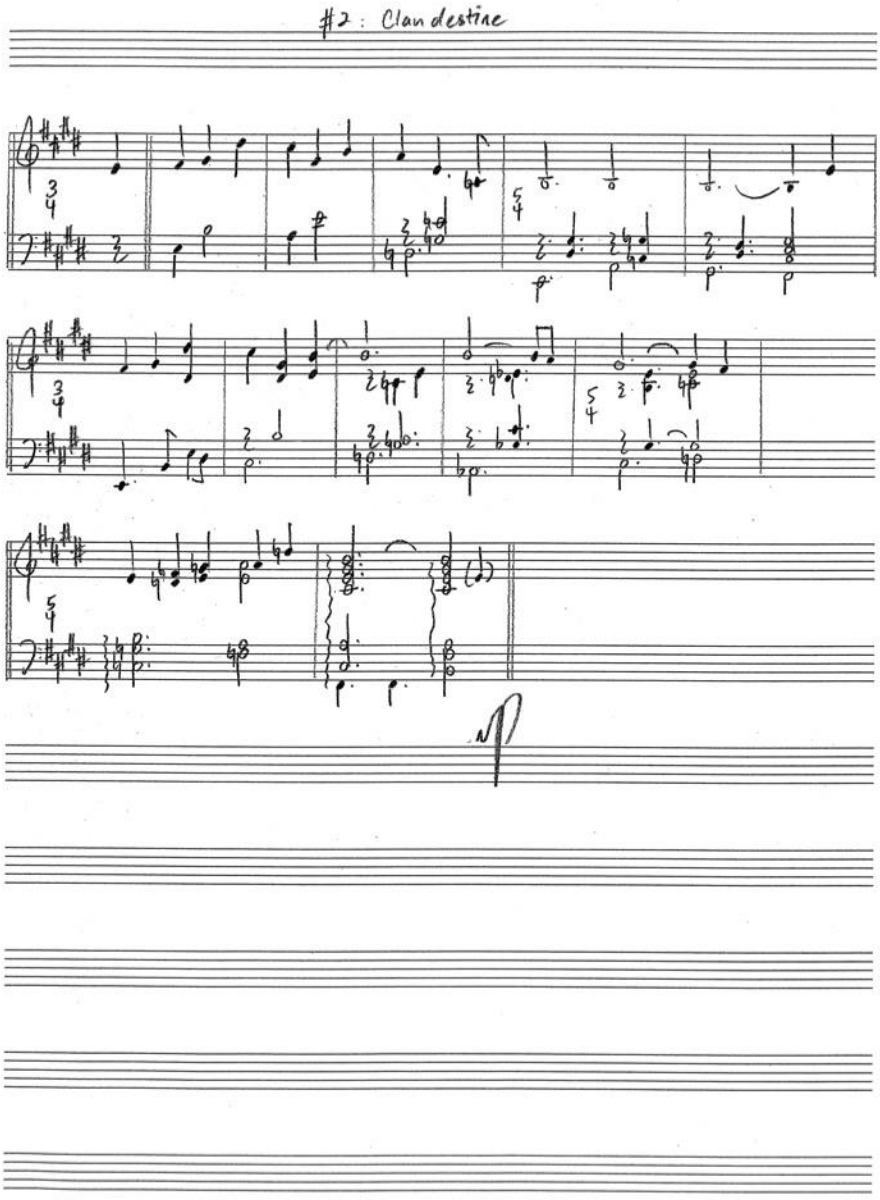


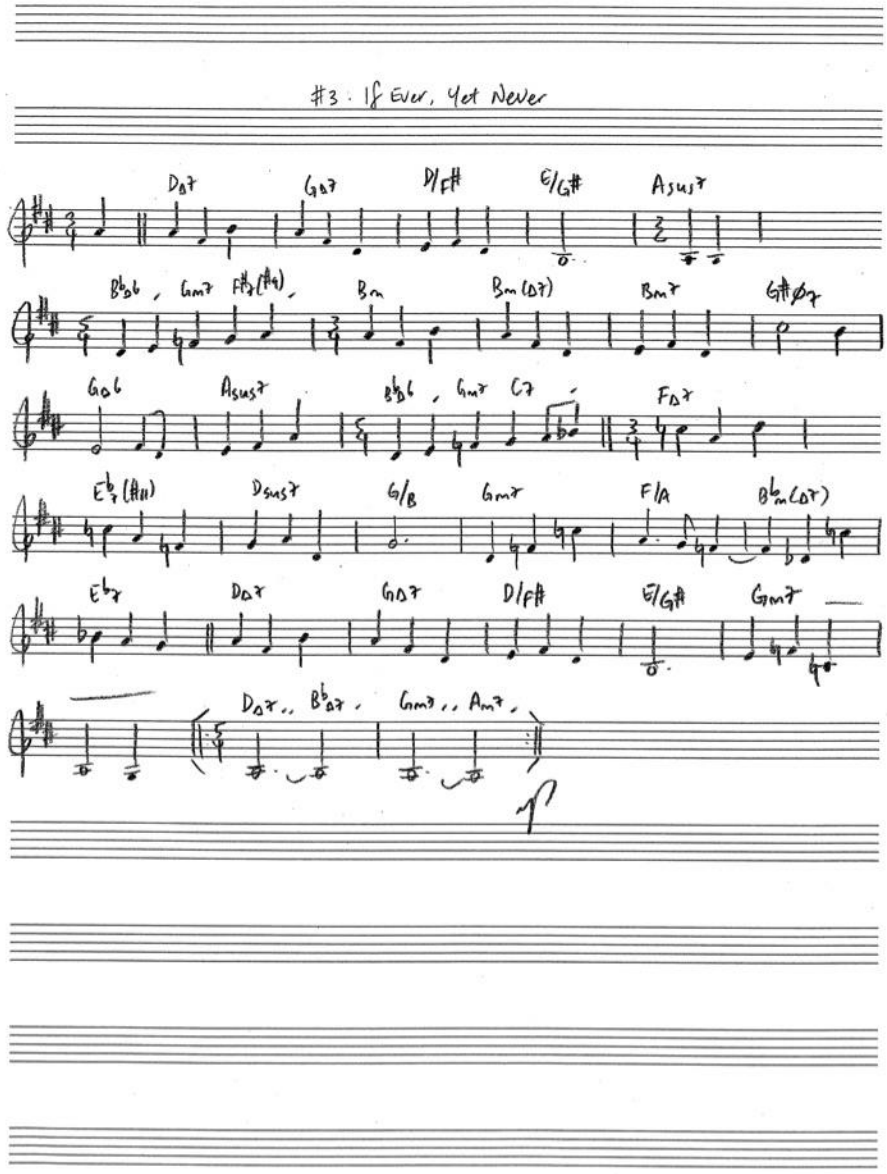

[ 130 ]



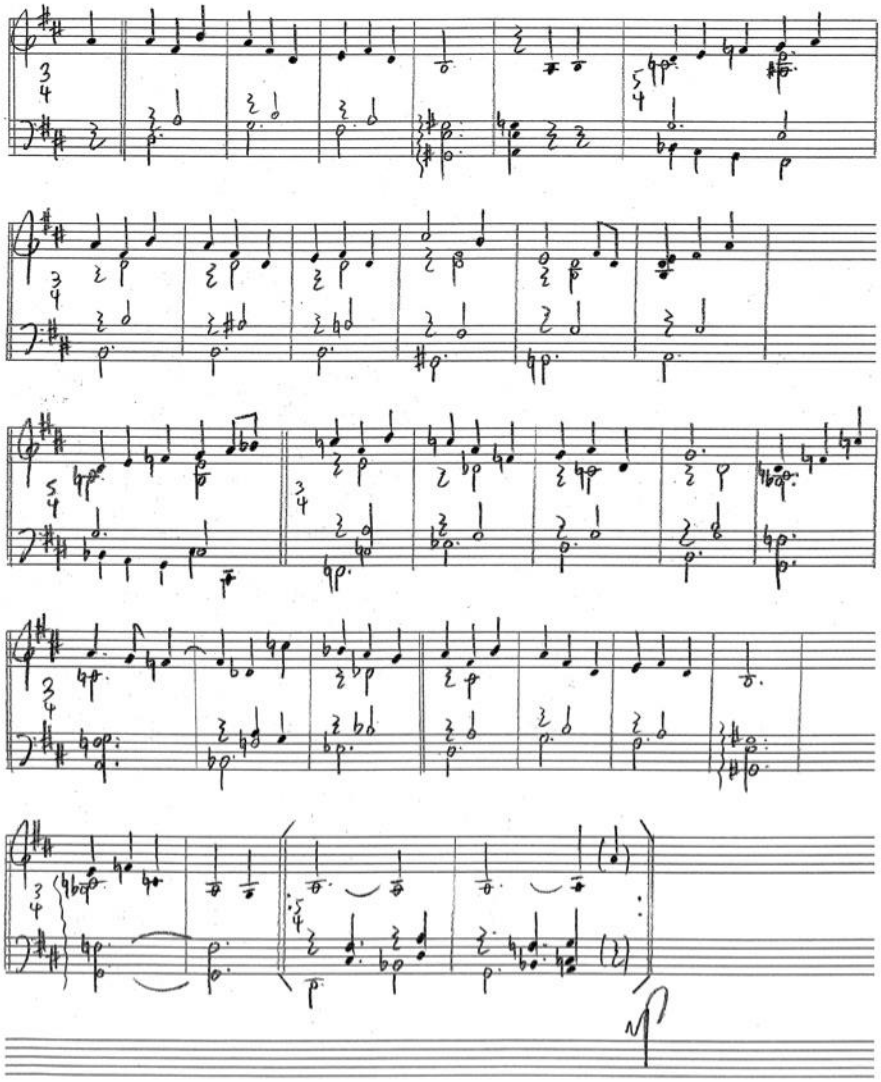

[ 131 ]


#2: Clandestine
E♭7
A♭7
Dsus7
E♭ . . A♭m7 . G♭7 . . F♯m7
E♭7
Cm7
Dsus7
A♭7 (♭9)
Cm7 . . D7 (♯11)
C7 . . F7
F♯m7 . . Bsus7


#2 : Clandestine


#3 · If Ever, Yet Never
D△7
G△7
D/F#
E/G#
Asus7
B♭△6
Gm7
F#7(#9)
Bm
Bm(△7)
Bm7
G#ø7
G△6
Asus7
B♭△6
Gm7
C7
F△7
E♭7(#11)
Dsus7
G/B
Gm7
F/A
B♭m(△7)
E♭7
D△7
G△7
D/F#
E/G#
Gm7
D△7
B♭△7
Gm7
Am7

#3: If Ever, Yet Never



[ 135 ]

## Recordings

London Improviser's Orchestra (2017-2018):
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eLbm_WFYfuXXpUKPbKV_WfF2e2VQG66l?usp=sharing
This recording contains only the sessions that I participated in. Full list of musicians and conductors included in each folder.

Veryan-Pei Duo: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1raq0vESaMvyFO6-RN402798uxFPHBqZz/view?usp=sharing
(15th April 2018) Mopomoso monthly gig at The Vortex, London. Personal recording.

TriYeoh: (27th April 2018) Recorded at Birmingham (private studio). Jim Bashford – drums, Ash Trigg – electric bass, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Recorded and mixed: Luke Morrish-Thomas. Released on FMR Records: https://www.subradar.no/album/triyeoh/futile

A Touch of Klez: https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/sets/a-touch-of-klez/s-GvyEc
(March 2010) Katie Stevens – clarinet, Andrew Hopper – cello, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

JP-Pei Duo: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1--kLrboMZVQ-gT2LT23OMleMS-Tnj3u_?usp=sharing
(31st May 2018) Live recording at Goodenough College, London. JP Muir – piano, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

The Goodenough Band 'Between Here and Now':
https://soundcloud.com/pyeohkcl/sets/the-goodenough-band-between/s-l52Yn
(June 2018) Recorded at Bloomsbury, London (private studio). Emanuel Heitz – electric guitar, vocals, composition. Marc-Olivier Turgeon – acoustic guitar, lead vocals, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin, ukulele, electric bass, accordion, vocals. Recorded and mixed: Bobby Williams.

No Further Noise: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xzGlekjCjnPYm0fm6kTI-1wFjFBtyxjS
(4th July 2017) Live recording at INO, Leipzig. Jonas Dorn – electric guitar, Clemens Litschko – drums, Philipp Martin – electric bass, Pei Ann Yeoh – violin. Personal recording.

## Programmes

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RLXOrAbS5u__LhtBdUueaPjn4PU6c-aO?usp=sharing

20th October 2016 – Bloomsbury Festival: Goodensemble

19th January 2017 – Music Week: Winter Concert

21st January 2017 – Music Week: Twilight Concert

5th March 2017 – Lent Concert: Goodensemble

10th March 2017 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

29th March 2017 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

10th May 2017 – MSF Benefit Concert

21st May 2017 – Musicians in Space, IKLECTIK

26th May 217 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

24th June 2017 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

23rd July 2017 – Marriage of Figaro: Strand Chamber Orchestra

27th September 2017 – Music and Desserts Concert

3rd October 2017 – Music for Malaysia, British-Malaysian Society

18th-22nd October 2017 – Bloomsbury Festival: Bloomsbury Songs

3rd December 2017 – Warsaw Improvisation Festival

18th January 2018 – Music Week: Winter Concert

28th January 2018 – Cabaret in Captivity

9th March 2018 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

26th March 2018 – Candlelit Chapel Concert Series

20th April 2018 – Good Vibes Concert: The Goodenough Band

2nd June 2018 – Brazilian Radio Opera: A Noiva do Condutor

5th June 2018 – Leavers Concert

16th June 2018 – New Arias Concert